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Political Communication and Performative Leadership

Populism in International Politics

Edited by
Corina Lacatus
Gustav Meibauer
Georg Löfflmann

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Political Communication

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Introduction: Populism, Political Communication and Performative Leadership in International Politics

Corina Lacatus, Gustav Meibauer, and Georg Löfflmann

Who speaks for ‘the people’? Populists across the globe have mobilised this question to attack liberal institutions, political opponents, and the democratic process itself, communicating a political reality in which globalist elites have allegedly betrayed the sovereign will of the popular community. The recent ‘surge’ (Mudde, 2016) or ‘wave’ (Aslanidis, 2016) of populism around the world has encompassed electorally successful right-wing populist leaders in the Northern Hemisphere such as Donald Trump,

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Boris Johnson, Marine Le Pen, Jaroslav Kaczynski, Recep Erdogan, and Victor Orbán, who have advanced nationalist, exclusionary, protectionist and Eurosceptic political agendas. In parallel, left-wing populists in Greece, Spain and Bolivia have attracted voters disillusioned with neoliberal economic policies and existing representational mechanisms of liberal democracy with anti-elitist and anti-globalist platforms. In the Southern Hemisphere, Narendra Modi, Jair Bolsonaro and Yoweri Museveni are oft-cited examples of contemporary populist leaders who have enjoyed continued electoral success with agendas promoting ethnocultural and religious-Nationalist slogans in post-colonial contexts. Prior analyses of these populists' electoral success and political leadership have usually focused on the ideas, ideologies and strategies populism encompasses, especially in the domestic political arena.

The contributions in this volume examine the intersections of populist political communication, performative leadership, and international politics which lie at the centre of the contemporary revolt against the status quo in global affairs. This volume therefore centres its analysis on the global, transnational and international dimensions of populist politics, while engaging with populism's various communicative, discursive, and performative aspects and manifestations. The contributions accordingly focus on the use of strategic communication, political rhetoric, identity narratives, and a wide range of other discursive and media performances by contemporary populist leaders, in particular in the context of foreign policy and international politics, as well as their reception by international and domestic audiences. Collectively, this volume suggests that populist communication deeply and lastingly affects the processes, practices and outcomes of and international politics by reframing the relationship of domestic audiences, political establishments and international actors as a conceptual antagonism between the forgotten 'people' and the hostile 'elite'.

This populist communication advances policy agendas that challenge a post-World War II international order defined by liberal internationalism, multilateralism and institutionalised cooperation. It also has the potential to transform the making of foreign policy and the conduct of international politics. Indeed, the contributions illustrate how the antagonistic core logic of populism manifests as a particular leadership style in contemporary international politics, how it informs strategies of voter mobilisation and policy legitimisation in a global context, and what impact

populist rhetoric, performances and styles have on policies and practices in the realms of security, global health, economics and immigration.

This introduction proceeds in four steps: we start by situating this volume in the relevant academic literature, spanning populism studies, political communication, International Relations, and adjacent fields of study and explaining its overall aim and contribution to said literature. We then define key concepts that have guided our contributors in their examination of populist communication, performative leadership and international politics, and sketch some guiding assumptions on the relationship between populist actors, communication, audiences and policy impact. Next, we outline the structure and content of the volume and provide a brief summary of individual chapters, which have been organised into two parts, with part 1 examining the global interaction of populist leadership styles and communication, and how they manifest in individual decision-making processes and policy outcomes, and part 2 taking a look at the structural impact on international politics and how populism affects concepts of international order and established norms and institutions in trade, immigration, security and diplomacy on the macro-level. Finally, we summarise our findings and discuss their analytical and practical implications for the understanding of the international, performative and communicative dimensions of global populism.

SITUATING OUR APPROACH IN EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP

The global ‘return’ of populism has generated much academic interest among political scientists, which has significantly advanced our understanding particularly of populism’s domestic manifestations and its practical policy impacts. Scholars of domestic and comparative politics have explored at length political ideologies and socio-cultural contexts (Mudde, 2004), the electoral politics of populist parties (Meijers & Zaslove, 2021), the interests and values of populist voters (Akkerman et al., 2014), questions of voter mobilisation and populist political strategy (Jansen, 2011; Roberts, 2015), and the discursive importance of populist leaders (Hawkins, 2009; Weyland, 2001). Much of this research has tended to focus on populist movements and party-political systems in Latin and North America as well as Western Europe (de la Torre, 2015; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012).

Scholars of populism and political communication have long pointed out the ways in which electoral politics and populist rhetoric intersect to

produce populist styles of interlocution, transgression and performance (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Lacatus, 2019; McDonnell & Ondelli, 2022; Meibauer, 2021; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). This in turn contributes to, for instance, polarisation, distrust, and even violence, and may undermine the functioning of democratic institutions and societies. Populist communication may also have positive effects, such as increasing political participation and including marginalised groups into the political process by (re) integrating previously excluded constituencies. However, liberal features, such as institutional independence of the judiciary or constitutional checks and balances are negatively affected by the concentration of executive power legitimated through populism's homogenised articulation of the will of the people (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Increasingly, this scholarship has turned to study not only the discursive and communicative, but also the affective dimensions of populist rhetoric (Schumacher et al., 2022).

Scholars of International Relations have more recently started to explore how populist leaders influence foreign policy and international outcomes once they have taken office or become part of coalition governments (Chrysogelos, 2017; Plagemann & Destradi, 2019; Spandler & Söderbaum, 2023; Stengel et al., 2019; Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017; Wajner, 2021). Empirically, this scholarship tends to focus on practical outcomes and behavioural patterns, e.g. particular trade or security policies, and their origin in populist ideas, ideologies, and politics (such as authoritarian and illiberal models of governance), including increasingly in the Global South (Plagemann et al., 2022; Wojczewski, 2019). The interest here has been twofold: on individual foreign policy outcomes of populist leaders, movements, and parties, as well as on the systemic impact of right-wing and left-wing populism on the political legitimacy and functional integrity of globalisation, international organisations and the liberal international order at large (Chrysogelos, 2020; Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021, 2022; Löffmann, 2022a; Spandler & Söderbaum, 2023; Wojczewski, 2019). The significance of communication, rhetoric, language and discourse for understanding the global rise of populism has similarly attracted growing scholarly attention. While populist discourses have frequently informed previous analyses in terms of providing the empirical material for analyses into populists' ideas and policies, they have now come to the fore in terms of conceptual and theoretical focus. In the discipline of International Relations, this holds especially for research on the intersection between populist narratives and ontological security (Fermor & Holland, 2020;

Homolar & Löffmann, 2021; Lacatus, 2021; Löffmann, 2019, 2022b; Steele & Homolar, 2019).

However, a systematic comparative exploration of populist communication and its implications for international politics is still missing. Our existing understanding of the significance of populist communication, performances of political leadership and authority, political rhetoric, and discourse in relation to processes and outcomes of international politics has remained limited. This is especially true if we consider the extent to which populism is not merely a performative spectacle to lure in voters and amplify grievances, but also a force to remake policies and effect structural change in the international system. This edited volume aims to address this gap in the academic literature by interrogating the intersection of populist communication, performative leadership and international politics. It explores the mechanisms and dynamics connecting these conceptual fields by drawing from scholarship in International Relations, political communication, political psychology and adjacent fields in political science, and by offering a wide range of empirical examples from contemporary populist leaders, movements and parties around the world. The volume therefore also expands the scope of empirical exploration in International Relations, which often prioritises the study of populism in the Western context.

SHARED CONCEPTS AND ASSUMPTIONS

All contributions to this volume start from shared concepts and assumptions that serve as analytical anchors. For one, we understand *populism* as a set of interlocking discourses in politics, media and society constructed around a central political antagonism between the idealised will of an imaginary ‘true people’ and a corrupt ‘elite’ (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2017). Populists claim to promote the interest of the people by curbing a dangerous Other who is a threat to the people’s sovereignty. They challenge the status quo, give voice to the collective will, and promise a political order that resonates with the longings and aspirations of the true ‘people’ (Moffitt, 2016; Rooduijn, 2014). Populists enact democratic politics not as grand clashes of complex political ideologies but as instinctive battles with elites for rights, voice and legitimacy (Sorensen, 2021). As contributions to this volume show, populism follows a similar logic in non-democratic political settings, even as the politics it speaks is to a different ‘people’ and opposes a different type of political elite. Populists may

reinforce existing autocratic governments, but also conjure a different view of the ‘people’, giving voice to the suppressed desire to break away from autocratic rule. In either case, populists lend political significance to particular narratives, symbols, and myths that serve their electoral goals, resonating with voters at an emotional level, e.g. by evoking nostalgia for an imagined past (Browning, 2019; Kinnvall, 2019; Menke & Wulf, 2021; Schumacher et al., 2022). This is already suggestive of the central role of political communication to the study of populism.

Populist communication concerns the language, deliberation and discursive performance of populist ideas, as well as how these discourses are translated between different interlocutors, including populist leaders, followers, voters, broadcast and social media and other audiences, both domestically and internationally (Condor et al., 2013; Jamieson et al., 2017; Lacatus, 2019, 2021; Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021, 2022). Communication is the ‘rocket fuel’ of populist politics (Sorensen, 2021). Populists around the world and across the political spectrum evoke images of polarised elites and people, giving voice to otherwise unspoken—or ignored, or unheard—calls for morality, authenticity and responsiveness in representative politics. In doing so, populist communication simultaneously creates a space for representing this ‘silent majority’ (Canovan, 1999, p. 5) and actively contributes to the production of its identity. In identifying establishment failure and linking the existence of a corrupt elite to wider socio-economic and socio-cultural anxieties and insecurities, populist performances and discourses simultaneously emphasise dramatisation, personalisation, emotionalisation, and conflict in their antagonistic framing of policy issues and representation of international politics (Wodak, 2015).

The interrogation of populist dynamics therefore necessarily involves studying the language, rhetoric and discursive *performance of populist leaders* (in comparison and contrast to other political actors), as well as the wider communicative production and contestation of populist political ideas and populist meaning-making. Kissas (2020, p. 270) argues that ‘the performative elements of communication [...] are to be taken not as mere epiphenomena of political activity but as the very means of doing politics and acting politically’. This concerns what has been labelled the populist style (Moffitt, 2016; Ostiguy, 2017), i.e. a distinct, combined repertoire of settings, aesthetics, theatricality, rhetoric, and affect (Aiolfi, 2022; Kurylo, 2022; Widmann, 2021), which appears in spoken word, text and other visual or auditory information, both in formal political deliberation

as well as in informal settings, offline as well as (increasingly) online. For example, populists are often argued to use a rhetorical style that is direct, intimate, simple, and indelicate (Bischof & Senninger, 2018; Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016), though notable differences persist due to, e.g. personal preferences and abilities, cultural contexts, societal norms, or party-political positions (Ekström et al., 2018; Maurer & Diehl, 2020; McDonnell & Ondelli, 2022). Similarly, the discursive contexts and conditions of political communication matter. For example, populist use of social media platforms, and the reception of populist political communication online has recently attracted considerable interest (Finlayson, 2022; Lacatus, 2021; Sorensen, 2018). Crucially, scholarship on populist styles and discourses has highlighted the performativity of such political communication, for instance with regard to strategic transgression, and a focus on concepts such as deception, authenticity, charisma, demagoguery and distinctly populist ‘leadership’ (Aiolfi, 2022; Fouquet & Brummer, 2023; Lacatus & Meibauer, 2022; Meibauer, 2021; Moffitt, 2016; Moraes, 2022).

Inevitably, populist communication and performative leadership interlink with *international politics*. By *international politics*, we mean the processes by which different actors, including states, international organisations, and non-state actors, interact at global, regional or trans-border levels. That international politics connects with populist communication is most obvious where international political issues influence populist narratives of the Other, e.g. regarding refugees, which can be leveraged for electoral gain, and which are aimed at ontological security needs of various international and domestic audiences (Homolar & Löffmann, 2021; Kurylo, 2022; Löffmann, 2022b). Populists (re)imagine the international sphere as a source of profound material and ontological insecurity for the ‘true people’ and blame the decline and existential crisis of the nation on the discredited ‘globalist’ policies and ideologies of a corrupt cosmopolitan elite and its pursuit of multilateralism, trade liberalisation and open borders (Caiani & Graziano, 2019; Moffitt, 2015; Rooduijn, 2014; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). From these multiple and multiplying crises, the populist leader and/or party offers saving, including by re-modelling and practising international politics in a distinctly populist mould (Maher et al., 2022).

The international dimension is thus central to the way populists legitimate their claim to power and authority. They claim to speak for those who have lost faith in the economic promises of globalisation, who resent unaccountable transnational elites and technocratic governance, and who

are disillusioned with the liberal establishment's discredited 'globalist' policies and ideologies, from cosmopolitanism, to international organisations or European integration and multilateralism (Anastasiou, 2019; Beeman, 2018; Casaroes & Farias, 2021; Freedon, 2017; Müller, 2017). A majority of populism scholars cite the eradication of heterogeneity and pronounced hostility towards pluralism in populism's articulation of a homogenised 'will of the people' as inherently anti-liberal. Nationalist populists ranging from Donald Trump to Viktor Orbán and Jair Bolsonaro raise the spectre of global democratic erosion towards far-right authoritarianism and even fascism, and thereby a wider undermining of liberal international order (Mudde, 2019; Stanley, 2018; also: Casaroes & Farias, 2021). Political theorists like Laclau (2005) and Mouffe (2018), on the other hand, award left-wing populism and associated groups like the Spanish Podemos or Syriza in Greece a positive, emancipatory-progressive quality for highlighting genuine socio-political and socio-economic grievances in society and responding to the global crisis of legitimacy of contemporary liberal democracy. Progressive populism is seen here as necessary democratic corrective to a neoliberal centrist consensus and the depoliticisation and disempowerment of societies through technocratic transnational governance. What unites these competing perspectives, however, is that they characterise populism as a relatively flexible political mode and discursive logic. Populist communication adapts to the particularities of different national contexts, including both specific grievances, anxieties, and resentments, but also electoral or institutional constraints. For example, populist leaders have shown considerable adaptability and even willingness to compromise internationally, e.g. regarding international organisations (Spandler & Söderbaum, 2023) or trade and investment (Morales, 2022).

Where previous scholarship has highlighted similarities and interconnections between how different populist politics react to international political issues across different countries (e.g. how global, regional and transborder issues are imagined, debated and used domestically for electoral gain), we argue that *the impact that populist communication has on international politics* is evident in two main aspects: (1) in the translation of domestic populist discourses into foreign policies and decision-making processes. This holds true across borders, in the case of different populist leaders, parties and movements. More specifically, the impact of populist communication on foreign policymaking concerns when and how states and other actors formulate responses and policies regarding, e.g.

migration, global health, climate change, trade or war. (2) Populist communication and populist performative leadership also affect key dynamics of international politics, from resistance against institutionalised multilateralism to opposition to free trade. They may even change the nature of international politics and influence how we may conceive of its core concepts, such as diplomacy, cooperation and order. This concerns, e.g. the practice of diplomatic negotiations now faced with populist transgression.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE VOLUME

Contributions to this volume investigate different facets of the roles that populist communication and performative leadership play in shaping international politics. In particular, our volume explores the transformative impact of populism on two principal dimensions of international politics. On the one hand, populist rhetoric and performative leadership in the domain of Domestic politics shapes the national governments' conduct of foreign policy both in the Global South and Global North, employing different mechanisms of influence depending on the specificities of each national context. On the other hand, populism can alter the fabric of international politics more generally. This concerns core practices and processes of international politics such as diplomacy or trade. Mirroring this logic of influence, the contributions to this volume have been organised accordingly into two parts: (1) the interrelation of populist communication, performative leadership and the foreign policies of populist leaders, parties and movements across the Global North and South; and (2) the impact of populist communication and performative leadership on international processes and outcomes.

PART 1: POPULIST COMMUNICATION, LEADERSHIP AND FOREIGN POLICY IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

Populist communication about foreign policy can be used strategically to advance different types of domestic leadership around the world. Depending on domestic contexts, varying conceptualisations of 'the people' can be imbued with both ideological and normative value. As *Linda Bos*, *Frederic Hopp* and *Penelope Sheets* show, populist political leaders perceive a moral obligation to place 'the people's' interests above all else,

including when they conduct international politics. In their comparative study of populist and non-populist parties in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, they find that communication on foreign policy issues lends itself well to moralisation, more than most other policy domains. While populist parties do not moralise foreign policy statements more, the authors demonstrate that it is essential to understand the differences between populist and non-populist leaders in the use of moralisation for strategic purposes, like building coalitions or mobilising support on morally salient issues such as humanitarian aid or climate change.

The strategic use of populist rhetoric about foreign policy in electoral campaigns in the West has been studied extensively. However, our understanding of the rhetorical and ideological machinations of populist candidates in the Global South is comparatively much more limited, with studies of African leaders being virtually non-existent. In addressing this gap, *Corina Lacatus* investigates the use of populist electoral rhetoric in a competitive autocratic setting, studying the populist communication of two political leaders—Museveni and Wine—opposing one another in Uganda’s most recent election in January 2022. Lacatus argues that, contrary to our expectations based on existing research, our understanding of the intersection between populist communication and ideological distinctions between right-wing and left-wing politics is insufficient for understanding the complex electoral realities of competitive autocratic regimes in the Global South, particularly in an African context. In Uganda’s most recent election, the two leaders make strategic use of foreign policy discourse about foreign aid and international development funding for radically different electoral purposes—Museveni aims to continue having Western support to advance his longstanding rule; Wine critiques Western support for Museveni, calls for Western support to overthrow his regime and instead support Wine’s candidacy to ultimately instate true democratic rule in Uganda.

Perhaps paradoxically, populist leaders can claim to advance the best interest of ‘the people’ to serve diverging political aims—this rhetorical position (sometimes advanced by the same populist party or leader or by different leaders/parties in the same election) can sometimes justify the continuity of existing political platforms and, at other times, it can propel new foreign policy practices which break with the existing establishment. As *David Cadier* shows in his chapter, populist practices shape foreign policymaking by promoting certain representations of Self and Others and by performing a rupture with the technocratic establishment. Cadier

discusses the Polish populist right-wing Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*—PiS). While in some areas of foreign policy, the PiS government has directly engaged with Poland's foreign policy tradition, either reinforcing it or contesting it, its reliance on populist stylistic performances as well as the marginalisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ultimately fed transgressions of diplomatic norms and diplomatic incidents.

In his chapter, *Federico Petris* argues that, to understand populist foreign policy, one needs to focus not on its substantive content, but rather on its single oppositional discursive logic. More specifically, as the analysis of the Northern League's early separatist rhetoric shows, the influence of populist discourse on foreign policy is not a substantive ideology resulting from the linear transposition of the traditional 'people vs elite' dichotomy. Rather than forcing foreign policy into a variable Self-Other logic, the articulations of the Other are informed by the particular policy field at hand, ultimately creating the grounds for contradictory positions held by populist parties in international policy arenas.

In a Latin American context, *Consuelo Thiers* and *Leslie Wehner* find that left-wing and right-wing populist leaders in Latin America differ considerably in their political attitudes, both compared to mainstream leaders as well as compared to each other. In general, populist leaders tend to promote expressions of non-cooperation and the use of threats as a means of persuasion in international fora, while at the same time, they are willing to shift to cooperative strategies where it suits their agenda. More specifically, left-leaning populist leaders also share in their speeches a pessimistic assessment of the international environment, while right-leaning populist leaders share a sense that international politics are predictable more so than either left-leaning populists or mainstream leaders.

Crises have always been central to populist politics, whether these crises are real and external (i.e. a large wave of migration or a humanitarian disaster) and impact on the conduct of foreign policy or these crises are of politicians' own making. Responding to the same crisis created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, *Fabrizio Coticchia* and *Bertjan Verbeek* propose a study of the extent to which political leaders might be open to foreign policy change and to belief change in their perspectives on international politics. Analysing the Northern League, the Five Star Movement, and Brothers of Italy—and in the case of two most vocal right-wing populist parties in the Netherlands—the Geert Wilders of the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* and Thierry Baudet of the *Forum voor Democratie*, the authors show that change in foreign policy approach to Russia can occur. Moreover, the

authors find variation in the extent and nature of the change that right-wing populist parties are willing to make. The Dutch parties included in their analysis differ greatly in their response to the Russo-Ukrainian war, while their Italian counterparts all radically changed their previously friendly attitude towards Putin.

In their chapter, *Ole Frahm and Dirk Lehmkuhl* find that thick ideology might indeed be more prevalent in the case of populist parties in decline—in response to a deep crisis, some populist parties in decline might respond by only changing some of their policy approaches opting to hold onto some unpopular policy despite the potentially high electoral costs. The authors take a close look at Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party, finding that, adjusting to this downturn, the party readily discarded some of the most unpopular policies, such as Turkey’s policy of zero problems with the neighbourhood. Surprisingly, however, they chose to uphold a deeply unpopular policy of continuing to host millions of (mostly) Syrian refugees. Frahm and Lehmkuhl contend that this behaviour is motivated by the persistence and centrality of core beliefs to populist leadership, which, in a situation of crisis, come to the fore by way of exclusion.

In their chapter, *Markus Ketola and Pontus Odmalm* argue that, while crises are generally central to the public discourse of radical right populist parties, these parties tend to be more successful at managing and responding to the potential of a crisis rather than to an actual crisis in the context of foreign policy and International Relations. Exploring the response of the Finns Party (*Perussuomalaiset*) and the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*) to their responses to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, the authors find that the two parties focus the crisis narrative on a discourse about values, symbols, and ways-of-life, often linking them to a rhetoric of imminent migration crisis as a result of war, and hence evade a discussion of policy-based crisis management. These two Scandinavian parties diverge from the individual saviour narratives found elsewhere in the Global North and emphasise ‘the party’ as the sole saviour of the looming disasters that are further immigration and pooling sovereignty as a defence strategy.

In the final chapter in this section, *Amy Skonieczny and Giorgio Davide Boggio* find that, when faced with a large-scale global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, a particular type of right-wing populism—‘chauvinistic populism’—can motivate a very divisive, exclusive and ‘bad-mannered’ transgressive form of leadership around the world. The authors show that Presidents Trump and Bolsonaro and Prime Minister Modi

chose not to adapt their tried-and-tested populist rhetoric to a crisis narrative that was otherwise widely used in response to a worldwide health crisis. Instead, they continued to emphasise their transgressive, norm-breaking discursive style aimed at breaking with liberal political norms of public decorum and at contesting democratic values.

PART 2: THE STRUCTURAL IMPACT OF GLOBAL POPULISM IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The transposition of populist communication and performative leadership via foreign policies can deeply shape and change key practices, processes and outcomes of international politics on the macro-level. This holds especially true for incumbent populist governments, such as Donald Trump's presidency in the United States of America or Narendra Modi's tenure as Prime Minister of India, whose impact extended beyond individual policy decisions and demonstrated the populist potential to engender wider geopolitical and geoeconomic transformations in the international system, from recalibrating relationships between major powers to challenging longstanding alliances and partnerships.

More indirect effects of remaking international politics are possible via populist coalition partners or even populists in opposition that shape how more mainstream governments enact their foreign policies and frame international politics as a source of external threat and insecurity. The shifting of official political rhetoric on diplomacy, trade or immigration can occur via the mainstreaming of populist positions and the reorientation of geostrategic tenets according to more confrontational and antagonistic interpretations of world politics. Alongside and interlinked with these structural shifts are other transformative trends, such as increased polarisation, digitisation, changes in media consumption and demographics, which fuel populist contestation, leadership styles and communication and which have the potential to structurally transform how governments, international organisations and other non-state actors think about, conduct and evaluate international politics. This multidimensional interlinkage between domestic and international politics, between communication, performance, and policymaking, and between national, international, and transnational phenomena may challenge our understanding of populism, particularly how we conceptualise populist communication and leadership styles.

In his contribution, *Théo Aiolfi* advances a view of populism as a political style, an open-ended repertoire of performances of identity, transgression and crisis. He focuses in particular on performances of identity in the political communication of politicians embracing populism on the global stage, and details how they might articulate the people, the elites and the leader respectively. Mobilising the people in international contexts can be key to the populist's legitimacy as representing and channelling the common will. Anti-elite rhetoric can be employed to legitimise transgressive practices and a withdrawal from international order. Finally, the populist's performance of people, elite, and Self, to the extent that it permeates, e.g. the conduct of diplomacy, summitry or treaty negotiations, may in turn affect how non-populist leaders, e.g. other heads of state witnessing the respective populist's performance, conceive of international politics. More generally, Aiolfi makes a case for moving beyond state-centrism in International Relations, to better understand the emergence of transnational and even global populism as a political phenomenon that transcends particular national contexts.

Gustav Meibauer asserts that populists often perform a particular type of leadership, whether domestically or abroad: that of the charismatic strongman capable of channelling the people's will, including in appearing on the world stage and representing the people internationally. Such populists have been found to frequently resort to deceptive communication in electoral contexts, e.g. to evade scrutiny, assert dominance or generally transgress the rules of political discourse. Meibauer argues that such deceptive communication is tightly interlinked with populist ideas and performances. To that end, he focuses on the concept of 'populist bullshit' and shows four thematic and conceptual points of connection: (1) populist bullshit as partisan transgression, (2) populist bullshit as a marker of authenticity, (3) populist bullshit as entertainment, (4) populist bullshit as an empty signifier. He discusses the possible effects of populist bullshit on international politics, and points out avenues for further research into the phenomenon. Here, populist bullshit may over time undermine the trust either in interpersonal or institutional relations necessary to sustain key practices of coordination and cooperation in international politics. This erosion may favour the emergence of disorder, to be furthered and exploited by revisionist actors.

Domestic politics and international politics intersect, and influence each other, most clearly in the populist's visits abroad. Whether in office or in opposition, when populist leaders go abroad, they may encounter

circumstances dissimilar to the particular domestic contexts in which they usually communicate or perform. At the same time as their performances abroad may still be carefully scrutinised by relevant audiences at home, they may also need to adapt to foreign contexts—translating ideas, styles and personas to new audiences with different perspectives on foreign policy and international politics. Indeed, complementing the notion of decidedly transnational populist communication and leadership, *Chetan Rana* explores the distinctive populist repertoire employed by the Indian Prime Minister Modi in his engagement with Indian-Americans and Indians living in the United States, which make up the largest Indian community in the diaspora. Modi regularly holds large events during his foreign policy trips, directly engaging the diaspora. In his discourse to these communities, he strategically expands the conception of ‘the people’ to include foreign audiences of voters and supporters. Despite adapting his public communication slightly to the perceived interests and needs of the diaspora, Modi’s discourse remains laced with ethno-populist undertones. This speaks to the persistence of particular communicative and leadership styles as well as underlying political ideas in the populist’s persona. It also raises questions for the host country—at what point does prominently speaking or interacting with diasporas constitute undue foreign influence, given that diaspora members may well be politically active, vote, etc. where they live, rather than where they come from?

Eduardo Ryo Tamaki and Gustavo Venturelli thereby show that the idea of ‘the people’ need not be construed solely domestically, nor limited to specific regional or national characteristics. Rather, it can be successfully developed abroad, during visits to nations with right-wing populist parties in power, and moulded to include distinctly transnational elements. Tamaki and Venturelli show that in his speeches abroad, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro mobilised far-right populist rhetoric with the purpose of advancing a common international narrative of a singular transnational ‘people’ with a shared identity and opposing a set of common global enemies. Just as the preceding chapter, then, this chapter widens our perspective on the relevant audiences and loci of populist communication. Populism is then a transnational phenomenon not only because it occurs in different places worldwide, but more specifically because it includes specific transnational practices, such as visits abroad. Speeches abroad play out in different contexts, and populists are quite willing to adapt. Concurrently, what populist leaders say abroad is not simply an export product. Instead, it also seems to affect in turn the type of ideas and styles

they may adopt back home, and the policies and behaviours they may turn to when in government.

Diplomacy is arguably the international practice most crucial to sustaining international order and cooperation between states. As such, it is of the utmost importance, both conceptually and empirically, whether how populist leaders and populist-led governments conduct themselves as diplomats and negotiators affects the practice of diplomacy, and in turn wider international order. *Prima facie*, one may expect populists to behave undiplomatically: after all, transgression is key to populist performance. *Sandra Destradi, Johannes Plagemann, Ege Husemoglu, Vihang Jumble, Alyssa Santiago and Ronald Schleehauf* explore the extent to which populist governments adopt a more confrontational rhetoric in their diplomatic interactions. Claiming to embody the popular will and embracing a Manichean and moralistic worldview is expected to lead to a more ‘black-and-white’ understanding of and conduct in international politics, as well as a harsher approach to competitors and enemies. They consider four countries in their research—India, Italy, Philippines, and Turkey—and find that, in general, the shift to a populist government led to the expected adoption of a more confrontational rhetoric. However, this behaviour is not consistent over time in all countries, as some populist governments turned much friendlier towards their populist counterparts in other countries. Here, we may see the building blocks of a populist international. Moreover, in moments where voters do not find foreign policy to be of importance, this rhetorical aggression will fade over time. This may be suggestive of the predominantly domestic and electoral orientation of populists in power.

Emmanuelle Blanc turns to the effects such a confrontative and transgressive populist strategy of anti-diplomacy may have on diplomacy and cooperation. She argues that Trump’s personalism, preference for high-level summitry, and transgressive communicative style have all contributed to the weakening of the US professional diplomatic corps. In her chapter, she focuses in particular on the effects of populist communication on transatlantic diplomacy, specifically the ‘everyday’ diplomatic practice of dialogues. She shows that while Trump’s populist rhetoric has changed the substance of transatlantic diplomatic exchanges, it has also triggered defensive responses from various diplomatic actors. She suggests that this demonstrates the resilience of diplomacy as a cooperative international practice in the face of populist challenges. This carefully nuances more alarmist views of the effects of populism on international politics at the

same time as it highlights the necessity to defend existing norms and institutions from transgressive contestation.

Finally, *Alexandra Homolar and Georg Löfflmann* show how right-wing populist actors have constructed a security imaginary around the loss of past national greatness. They conceive of such a humiliation narrative as a key discursive mechanism by which populists can turn more abstract notions of enmity into more concrete and politically consequential sentiments of loss, betrayal and oppression. The authors suggest that this emotive response enables a radical departure from established domestic and international policy norms and problematises policy choices centred on collaboration, dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution, which normatively underpin the existing international order as well as liberal democracy. The January 6 riot in the United States has thereby underlined the potential of such humiliation narratives of popular victimhood to be exploited by populist actors for the antagonistic mobilisation of voters and the legitimisation of politically motivated violence against core institutions of liberal democracy—such as the peaceful transition of power—framed as hostile and deliberately injuring the ‘true people’. This raises the spectre of growing authoritarianism and further democratic erosion as a result of populist communication and mobilisation against the ‘elite’ both domestically and internationally.

CONCLUSION

The contributions to this volume investigate the effects of populist communication and leadership performances on how states and other actors interact in the international sphere. This is the first volume to theorise the interaction of populist politics, and specifically populist communication, with international politics (and their interrelation with key concepts of the disciplinary field of International Relations). Moreover, the chapters collected in this volume interrogate when and how populist communication affects the foreign policy process and its outcomes. This concerns how international issues are narrated, deliberated and decided upon. It also involves the ways in which populist communication, all the way from specific ‘talking points’ to broader discourses on, e.g. Self and Other, permeate not only top-level leadership, but also wider bureaucracies and non-state foreign policy actors, as well as how other actors may position themselves against it, to influence why, how and when foreign policy is made. This also includes the communicative processes through which

particular foreign policy outcomes and behaviours flow from populist discourse, e.g. regarding protectionist or isolationist tendencies, or more aggressive policies. A more carefully calibrated understanding of the international dimension of populism thereby also requires us to adopt a more nuanced understanding of the conceptual differences and similarities in the political communication and performative leadership of both left-wing and right-wing populists, which our contributors address.

The volume offers a diversity of empirical cases from around the world, in an attempt to widen the scope of research beyond the story of populism in the 'West' and to capture its transnational and geopolitical manifestations, ranging from Latin America to Africa and the Asia-Pacific. A broader understanding of populism as a truly global phenomenon is essential given that, despite the dearth of research on some regions, populist politics has been endemic for decades in different parts of the Global South and has often placed international politics and foreign policy (issues like foreign aid, for instance) at its centre. The contributions collected in this volume therefore enhance our understanding of the effects of populist on foreign policy and international politics by adding several case studies on populist communication in the Global South, including the first study (in *International Relations*) on populism in an African country.

This volume's overarching contribution to the existing scholarship is twofold—first, it adds valuable conceptual and theoretical insights to the fast-growing scholarship on populism, foreign policy, and *International Relations* by highlighting the importance of populist communication and leadership performances and how these populist repertoires interact with the formulation and implementation of foreign policy and the structure of the international system. The things populists say, and how they say them, matter. As the contributions to this volume show, they deeply affect the continued practice and outcomes of diplomacy, trade, security, and international order; if not always in straightforward or expected ways.

Second, this volume makes an important empirical contribution by bringing to the forefront analyses of populist communication across both the Global North and South, and by highlighting the international and transnational dynamics of the communicative and performative populist styles examined by our contributors. Despite populist politics being commonplace across the world, we note a dearth of dedicated research explaining how and why populist communication interlinks with and affects foreign policies and international politics beyond the Americas and Western Europe, and how these populisms compare within and across

cases. The examinations undertaken by the contributions collected in this volume not only challenge a more simplistic understanding of populism as based solely in ideological commitment; collectively, they provide a hitherto overlooked, nuanced and detailed perspective on the global interlinkages of populist political communication, leadership styles, and political practices in contemporary international politics.

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PART I

Populist Communication and Foreign
Policy in Global Context



Populist Moralization of Foreign Policy Issues

Linda Bos, Frederic R. Hopp, and Penelope Sheets

Honourable members, I stand here in front of you and I defend my country because for Hungarians liberty, democracy, independence and Europe are questions of Honour. This is why I say that the report in front of you insults Hungary and insults the honour of the Hungarian nation. Hungary's decisions are taken by voters at parliamentary elections and you state nothing less but that Hungary is not reliable enough to decide what is in its interest. You believe you know better than what Hungarians they need themselves. Therefore I have to say that this report does not give due respect to Hungarians. The report uses double standards [and] abuses its power and goes beyond competences. Its methodology, its approval, violates the treaty.

This is how Victor Orbán addressed the European Parliament on 11 September 2018 when the latter voted on a report to punish Hungary for its breaches of the European Union's core values. Victor Orbán is considered a populist far right politician and is known for his populist

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communication style. Here, populism is perceived as a communication style that can be discerned in utterances of political elites, but also in news coverage or social media content. Following Mudde (2007), the populist message is defined as depicting an antagonistic relationship between ‘we, the people’, on the one hand and the political elite and other out-groups on the other (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Yet scholars relying on this conceptualization often find it difficult to rhetorically distinguish populists from non-populists (e.g. Bos et al., 2011; Engesser et al., 2017; McDonnell & Ondelli, 2020). This might be a consequence of the fact that there is more to populist communication than the people/elite distinction, such as using a distinctive performative style (see Lacatus et al. in the introduction). Here we focus on the usage of moral appeals: populists do not simply distinguish between an in-group and an out-group; they do this by appealing to moral values: the people are good and moral, and the elite is bad, immoral, and corrupt (Müller, 2016). While this moral distinction between the people and the elite is at the core of the populist Manichean worldview, we know fairly little about the extent to which populist politicians are more likely to use moral appeals in their messages (cf. Bos & Minihold, 2022).

This is surprising, because the moralization of a political message is likely to appeal to (Lipsitz, 2018) and convince voters and thus have mobilizing effects (Jung, 2020). However, moral appeals are also argued to induce “‘other-condemning” emotions and action tendencies that can drive citizens apart’ (Ryan, 2014, p. 383), thus fostering interpersonal intolerance and (issue) polarization (Clifford, 2019). It is therefore paramount to understand the extent to which political leaders are likely to use moral appeals, especially when they discuss International Relations—in which the consequences of interpersonal intolerance and polarization have implications not only for national stability but for global conflict and security. Moralization in international political communication can be expected for several reasons: first, (populist) political leaders may perceive a moral obligation to place ‘the people’s’ interests above all else in international politics, responding to potential infringements of national sovereignty with heightened moral rhetoric geared towards the protection of one’s nation. Orbán’s response above is in line with this. He defended the nation by alluding to moral values such as honour, respect, and harm. Alternatively, moralization may strategically be used for international coalition building, emphasizing tribal notions of ‘us-versus-them’ (e.g. EU/NATO versus Russia), or as a mobilizing technique on morally salient issues such as humanitarian aid or climate change. Thus, the international policy domain

is ripe for moralization by strategic political actors, the consequences of which can be potentially global.

With this in mind, this chapter explores the extent to which policy statements on International Relations are moralized by both populist and non-populist parties. We do so by performing an automated content analysis on manifesto data from 22 elections in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (using the Comparative Manifestos Project—CMP; $n = 215,625$ policy statements) to parse the extent to which this moralized, Manichean outlook is unique to populist rhetoric or not. Election manifestos are the ideal outlets to gauge the policy preferences of parties, and, because they are texts written by and for the party, are perhaps the purest articulation of a party's ideology. In addition, by offering us coding of policy issues in manifestos, the CMP allows us to tease out not only to what extent populist parties moralize foreign policy issues more than non-populist parties, but also whether specific issues lend themselves more or less to moralization. In addition, we explore the extent to which different moral appeals are used by (non-)populist parties in specific foreign policy areas.

MORAL RHETORIC IN PARTY MANIFESTOS

We conceptualize morality in political communication by focusing on the extent to which communication on different political issues makes use of moral and non-moral rhetoric. Specifically, we focus on the use of moral language in party manifestos. While election manifestos are generally well-suited for the comparative study of party positions on multiple domestic and foreign policy issues, little is known about the use of moral rhetoric in these documents. On the one hand, manifestos are often sanitized, amended by multiple authors, and generally not written to persuade voters, but are used to streamline the campaign and provide candidates with an overview of party positions (Eder et al., 2017). In that sense, manifesto statements may be less moralized than other campaign materials, including social media (Bos & Minihold, 2022) and speeches (Wang & Inbar, 2021). Yet, as manifestos form the template for the political campaign, any moralized statement in these texts reflects the official moral standpoint of the party.

By making use of subtle moral framing (Spielvogel, 2005) almost any issue can be 'moralized' by connecting it to deeply held beliefs about what is morally right and wrong (Anderson et al., 2014; Lakoff, 2010). This

depends on a range of factors, including one's (political) socialization (Graham et al., 2009). The resulting 'moral worldview' one adheres to is argued to guide positions on political issues (Strimling et al., 2019), for voters and politicians alike. This implies that moral rhetoric differs for politicians and parties with different moral standpoints (Wang & Inbar, 2021): they forward different arguments why a certain course taken is in fact (im)moral. Not only does this have consequences for *which* issues are moralized but also *how*.

Haidt and Graham (2007) distinguish several dimensions of morality in their *Moral Foundations Theory* (MFT). They argue that moral intuitions are rooted in five distinct, yet universal and innate, psychological mechanisms that are edited by experience and socialization. Each foundation serves a different, but related social function. First there are two '*individualizing foundations*', aimed at protecting individual rights and well-being: (1) Care/Harm (sensitivity to individual suffering), and (2) Fairness/Cheating (sensitivity to disproportionality). In addition, there are *three binding foundations* that are aimed at group protection: (3) Loyalty/Betrayal (sensitivity to group loyalty), (4) Authority/Subversion (sensitivity to social rank and position), (5) Disgust/Purity (sensitivity to social threats and taboos). MFT is increasingly used in (political) communication research to investigate the extent to which political actors moralize their statements, and by doing so, appeal to different moral values (Bos & Minihold, 2022; Marietta, 2008; Wang & Inbar, 2021). In this way, politicians not only make clear *whether* a specific policy or standpoint is in fact morally right or wrong but also *why*—e.g. because it is unfair, disloyal, or harmful.

Appealing to morality and values in political communication is nothing new. From earlier discussions of 'symbolic politics' (see Busby, 2007), to the strategic invocation of morality in promoting foreign policy (Coe et al., 2004; Spielvogel, 2005), to the public reinforcement of the moral superiority of the national group during international conflict (e.g. Entman, 1991; Rowling et al., 2015; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008), researchers have long studied the strategic power of morality-laden rhetoric among political actors. Perhaps because of its link to innate moral foundations (Haidt & Graham, 2007), moralized rhetoric is powerful because of its ability to polarize (Feinberg et al., 2019), and unite disparate groups of people (Feinberg & Willer, 2015). That is, shared values or moral frameworks are one way to overcome disparate or diverse ethnic or religious identities. Debates over ethnic versus constitutional patriotism illustrate

this acutely: in societies where the national population never shared one common ethnic past (e.g. the United States of America), the coherence of the group is nevertheless quite powerfully constructed through a moral appeal to shared values and norms—very effectively creating an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983).

Notably, these instances of moral rhetoric in political communication almost always relate to a group—and a shared sense of morally right and wrong held by a specific group of people (Greene, 2014). Like the moral intuitions discussed earlier, group identification is an equally powerful, innate psychological force (Tajfel, 1982). That is, humans have a natural tendency to not only classify each other into groups, but to derive comfort, self-esteem, and a sense of security or safety from the groups we identify with (Mercer, 1995). Notably, such positive ingroup-identification also often comes at the expense of groups we are not a part of (Feinberg et al., 2019; Greene, 2014; Mitzen, 2006).

Though social identities can take many forms—ethnic, religious, partisan—arguably the most pervasive and powerful in the modern era is national identity. Cultural myths, shared stories, and embedded social narratives are told and repeated daily by citizens and group leaders to appeal to and maintain citizens’ sense of connection with a national group (Billig, 1995). Furthermore, news routines and domestication processes (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017) reinforce the national lens in most stories we hear about other parts of the world. Thus, national identity is a particularly powerful form of social identity: it is constantly reinforced, capable of uniting (and dividing) entire groups of people, and of motivating citizens to fight, kill, and die for their country.

If we accept the natural link between moralized rhetoric and discussions where group identity is particularly salient, it follows that manifesto rhetoric related to foreign (versus domestic) policy should entail more moralized rhetoric. Put more simply: a moral support and conception of the shared values of the national in-group is essentially politically ‘safe ground’ for any party, regardless of its ideology. But we argue that when in-group identity is discussed with regard to an ‘Other’, i.e. in the foreign policy context, the temptation to moralize should be even stronger (see Friedrichs, 2022), because the national identity is ‘at play’ in such discussions. Therefore, we expect:

H1 There is more moralization in foreign than in domestic policy issues.

However, there are many distinct foreign policy issues. Some are directly concerned with life and death (defense policy) or moral responsibilities towards foreign special relationships or building peace. While other foreign policy issues always affect the nation and the national identity—such as regional integration—they might be less prone to moralization by political elites. We therefore also explore differences in moralization of different foreign policy issues:

RQ1 To what extent are different foreign policy issues moralized?

In this chapter we are specifically interested in differences between populist parties and non-populist parties. To conceptualize populism, we depart from Mudde (2004, p. 543) who regards populism as ‘*an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people*’. Populist parties adhere to this ‘thin’ ideology but subsequently differ in many respects, depending on the thick ideology that is attached to their populist core. Here, there is a clear distinction between populists on the right, also dubbed the *populist radical right* (PRR) (Mudde, 2013), and populists on the left. The common ground of the PRR is found in their nationalist/nativist agenda, their authoritarianism, and their populist ideology (Mudde, 2007; Taggart, 2000). Left-wing populist parties are also anti-establishment, but instead of ‘excluding the aliens’ they focus on ‘including the poor’ (Van Kessel, 2015). What unites populists from different walks of life, however, is their focus on morality (Mudde, 2004): all populists pit the ‘pure’ people against the ‘*immoral*, corrupt’ elite, making the populist claim *moral* and symbolic, not empirical, in nature, meaning ‘it cannot be disproven’ (our italics). In addition, populists are antipluralist: ‘they, and only they represent the true people’ (Müller, 2016, p. 72). One of the important consequences of this populist moral logic is its Manichean outlook: contrary opinions are illegitimate, as is compromise, and political conflict is *moralized* by denouncing political opponents as evil, enemies of the people as a whole (e.g. Mudde, 2004).

Yet, empirical research looking into rhetorical differences between populists and non-populists is scarce and mainly focused on specific cases (Alizadeh et al., 2019; Friedrichs, 2022; Lewis, 2019; Norocel, 2013). The one systematic study by Bos and Minihold (2022) shows that populists in three Western European countries consistently use more negative moral appeals—making clear what is *immoral*—and appeal more to

morality on Twitter. Yet, their study also shows that populists are not likely to use more moral appeals in party manifestos in general. This raises the question whether some policy issues, such as foreign policy issues, lend themselves more to moralization by populists than others.

It is argued that populist parties face a more difficult challenge than mainstream parties in finding their position on foreign policy, because of the salience of the demarcation-integration cleavage (Kriesi et al., 2008)—the electoral cleavage increasingly aligning voters in their support for open versus closed societies, on both economic and cultural dimensions. This forces populist parties to explicitly define who belongs to the people and who does not (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017). The attached ideology subsequently guides foreign policy positions of populist parties (also see Destradi et al., 2021; Friedrichs, 2022). While the populist radical right limits the pure people to ‘a cultural unit defined within the nation state’ (p. 11), left-wing populists tend to have a more inclusionary conception of the exploited people, transcending national boundaries (but see Tamaki & Venturelli and Rana in this book). These different conceptualizations of the people spark different outlooks on foreign policy issues, meaning that it is the ‘thick’ ideology that determines foreign policy standpoints, not the populism that is attached to it (note that Petris shows that populist foreign policy is also dependent on the specific policy arena). However, what unites the populist left and right is their support for protectionism, and their critical stance (or opposition) towards Europeanization. In general, the PRR is considered isolationist, while left-wing populists are ‘social cosmopolitan’: they support ‘international arrangements to protect the weak and counter the existing hegemony’ (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017, p. 15). As a result, the latter do not reject international governance in principle, but contest it for its limits (Hooghe et al., 2019).

In other words, while one can observe many differences between specific populist movements on the left and right, what unites them in their foreign policy is not the substance but the rhetoric (Wehner & Thies, 2021): their support for and heralding of the ‘pure’ people, and their critical stance towards, or contempt of, the international elite leading to a suspicion of international or transnational institutions (Chrysogelos, 2017). This Manichean outlook is thus transported from national to foreign policy (also see Destradi et al. in this volume). In this chapter we do not focus on the content, but on the discursive treatment of foreign policy statements by populist parties. Recent research indeed shows that populists use populist argumentation to justify and legitimize or frame foreign

policy standpoints (Lacatus, 2021; Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021), and that the impact of populism on foreign policy concerns the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’ (Chrysogelos, 2021), resulting in emotive discourse (Homolar & Löffmann in this volume) that can turn harsh and friendly (Destradi et al. in this volume). Especially in the European context where most populists are Eurosceptics, populist argumentation is likely to be quite prominent in foreign policy statements. At the same time, the earlier discussion of manifesto features—often a compromise of party discussions—may diminish potential differences in moral rhetoric between populist and non-populist parties on foreign policy issues. Hence, we ask:

RQ2 Is there a greater likelihood to observe moralization in populist versus non-populist manifesto statements on foreign policy?

And, analogous to RQ1 we ask:

RQ3 Are populists more likely to moralize particular foreign policy issues compared to mainstream parties?

RESEARCH METHOD

To study the use of moral rhetoric in international political communication, we used the corpus of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Krause et al., 2018). We retrieved the annotated texts of 22 elections (Table 2.1) via the Application Programming Interface of the CMP. In the CMP, the manifestos were unitized into quasi-sentences, containing exactly one statement or message, and we dropped statements classified as headings, not assigned any category (see below), or that were labelled as ‘uncodable’. This resulted in 215,625 statements. All data were analysed in Python and preprocessed using the Natural Language Toolkit (Bird et al., 2009) to remove language-specific stopwords and punctuation marks from the text.

Measures

Policy Issues Each quasi-sentence in the CMP was manually coded into one of 56 standard categories, designed to be comparable between parties, countries, elections, and across time. The 56 categories were grouped into seven major policy areas: welfare and quality of life ($N = 62,583$; 29%), economy ($N = 49,849$; 23%), fabric of society ($N = 28,803$; 13%), external

Table 2.1 Overview of elections and parties

<i>Elections</i>	<i>Parties</i>
Austria 1999	FPÖ, GRÜNE, ÖVP, SPÖ
Austria 2002	FPÖ, GRÜNE, ÖVP, SPÖ
Austria 2006	BZÖ, FPÖ, GRÜNE, ÖVP, SPÖ
Austria 2008	BZÖ, FPÖ, GRÜNE, ÖVP, SPÖ
Austria 2013	FPÖ, GRÜNE, NEOS, ÖVP, SPÖ, TS
Austria 2017	FPÖ, GRÜNE, NEOS, ÖVP, PILZ, SPÖ
Austria 2019	FPÖ, GRÜNE, NEOS, ÖVP, SPÖ
Germany 1998	90.Greens, CDU.CSU, FDP, PDS, SPD
Germany 2002	90.Greens, CDU.CSU, FDP, PDS, SPD
Germany 2005	90.Greens, CDU.CSU, FDP, SPD
Germany 2009	90.Greens, CDU.CSU, FDP, LINKE, SPD
Germany 2013	90.Greens, AfD, CDU.CSU, FDP, LINKE, SPD
Germany 2017	90.Greens, AfD, CDU.CSU, FDP, LINKE, SPD
Germany 2021	90.Greens, AfD, CDU.CSU, FDP, LINKE, SPD
The Netherlands 2006	CDA, CU, D'66, GL, PVV, PvdA, PvdD, SGP, SP, VVD
The Netherlands 2010	CDA, CU, D'66, GL, PVV, PvdA, PvdD, SGP, SP, VVD
The Netherlands 2012	50PLUS, CDA, CU, D'66, GL, PVV, PvdA, PvdD, SGP, SP, VVD
The Netherlands 2017	50PLUS, CDA, CU, DENK, D'66, FvD, GL, PVV, PvdA, PvdD, SGP, SP, VVD
United Kingdom 2001	Labour, SNP
United Kingdom 2015	Conservatives, DUP, GPEW, Labour, LibDems, PC, SDLP, SF, SNP, UKIP, UUP
United Kingdom 2017	Conservatives, DUP, GPEW, Labour, LibDems, PC, SF, SNP, UKIP
United Kingdom 2019	Alliance, Conservatives, DUP, GPEW, Labour, LibDems, PC, SDLP, SF, SNP

relations ($N = 20,870$; 10%), social groups ($N = 19,036$; 9%) political system ($N = 18,195$; 8%), and freedom and democracy ($N = 16,289$; 8%). Here we focused on statements categorized as ‘external relations’ to reflect discussions of foreign policy issues. Specifically, we contrasted how moralization of foreign policy is different from moralization of other (domestic) policy issues and how these differences are modulated by party ideology.

Moral Foundations To estimate the presence of moral foundations in political elite appeals, we used the Moral Foundations Dictionary (MFD; Graham et al., 2009).¹ The MFD holds 11 lists of English words, for each

¹ The dictionary was designed for use in the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count program (LIWC) and adapted to Python, making use of regular expressions.

foundation two words (a positive ‘virtue’ and a negative ‘vice’) and a list of general moral words. Some words are assigned to more than one list. In addition to the original English MFD, we used the Dutch and German translated version of the MFD as introduced by Bos and Minihold (2022).

Each word in each statement was automatically coded for presence in the dictionary. For each moral foundation, a dichotomous variable was computed, indicating the absence/presence of said moral foundation, collapsing negative (vice) and positive (virtue) words ($M_{\text{Care/Harm}} = .15$; $M_{\text{Fairness/Cheating}} = .1$; $M_{\text{Loyalty/Betrayal}} = .12$; $M_{\text{Authority/Subversion}} = 0.11$; $M_{\text{Purity/Degradation}} = .06$). Three composite scores were used in the analyses. First, the propensity to moralize was calculated by computing a dichotomous variable indicating the presence of either one of the moral foundations or of general moral words ($M_{\text{P(Moralize)}} = .39$). In addition, a dummy variable was constructed to denote the presence of virtue words ($M_{\text{Virtue}} = .32$) and a second one signalling vice words ($M_{\text{Vice}} = .11$).

Ideology To study the extent to which moral appeals are affected by ideological differences, we use the categorization of the CMP to distinguish between (1) green parties (dubbed ecological by the CMP), (2) social democratic parties, (3) liberal parties, and (4) Christian and conservative parties (the two families are grouped together in this analysis). That leaves us with a number of parties considered socialist (the German PDS/Die Linke and the Dutch Socialist Party²) by the Manifesto Project, but populist far left by populism scholars (Rooduijn et al., 2019), and parties dubbed Nationalist by the Manifesto Project (the Austrian FPÖ and BZÖ, the Dutch PVV and FvD, and the German AfD), and populist far right by Rooduijn et al. (2019). Here we follow the latter, adding two more party families: (5) the left-wing populists and (6) the right-wing populists. It should be noted that there are populist parties that do not fit this left/right distinction, such as the Five Star Movement in Italy. The study period, however, did not include such parties in the countries studied. The remaining parties, dubbed single issue parties by the Manifesto Project, are included in the analyses but not as a separate party family (Table 2.2).

Controls We automatically assessed the length, in number of words, of each manifesto statement after preprocessing ($M = 8.40$, $SD = 4.51$). Additionally, because the use of moral words is closely related to valence,

²We do not take into account the manifesto of the Austrian Communist Party—only competing in the 2008 national elections.

Table 2.2 Classification of parties as mainstream or populist

<i>Country</i>	<i>Party type</i>	
	<i>Mainstream</i>	<i>Populist</i>
Austria	GRÜNE, NEOS, PILZ, SPÖ, TS, ÖVP	BZÖ, FPÖ
Germany	90/GRÜNE, CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD	AFD, LINKE, PDS
The Netherlands	50PLUS, CDA, CU, DENK, D'66, GL, PVDA, PVDD, SGP, VVD	FVD, PVV, SP
United Kingdom	ALLIANCE, CONSERVATIVES, DUP, GPEW, LABOUR, LIBDEMS, PC, SDLP, SNP, UKIP, UUP	SF

we also control for sentiment. We coded the sentiment of all statements using SentiStrength, denoting the number of positive and negative words per statement ($M_{\text{Positive}} = 1.26$, $SD_{\text{Positive}} = 0.51$; $M_{\text{Negative}} = 1.23$, $SD_{\text{Negative}} = 0.60$). SentiStrength is an opinion-mining algorithm created to identify and assess sentiment-related information and polarity (positive/negative) of social web data (Thelwall et al., 2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We first examined the extent to which different policy issues contain different moral appeals (H1 & RQ1). Figure 2.1 shows the mean proportion of moral appeals in manifestos per policy issue. A one-way ANOVA ($F =_{6,215,618} = 676.35$, $p < .000$) revealed significant differences in moralization across policy issues: almost half of the references to external relations (.489) or to the fabric of society³ (.482) contain moral appeals, whereas discussions of the economy are generally least moralized. Confirming H1, post-hoc tests revealed that statements referring to external relations are significantly more moralized than other policy issues (all $p = .001$), with the exception of discussions referring to the fabric of society ($p = 0.645$). This corroborates that the international policy domain, even in sanitized, non-emotional election manifestos, lends itself more to moralization than many other domestic policy issues. In addition, we see that moral statements on foreign policy often refer to principles on Care/Harm and Loyalty/Betrayal and that they include more positive than negative moral

³ Policy statements on ‘the fabric of society’ concern statements about, among others, the national way of life, morality, law and order, civic mindedness, and multiculturalism.

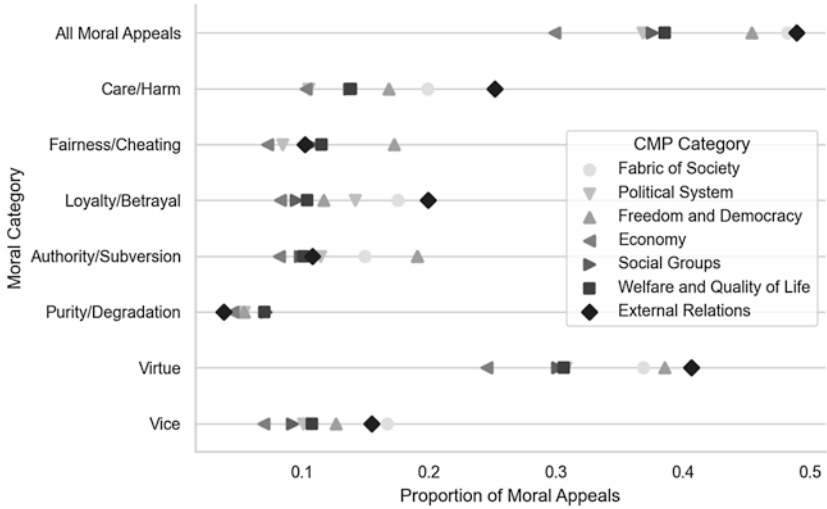


Fig. 2.1 Proportion of moral appeals in manifesto statements by policy issue. *Note.* $N = 215,625$. Symbols denote the proportion of statements in manifestos of each policy issue containing a moral appeal

words. This implies that foreign policy communication is mainly concerned with what is morally right, and this seems to be derived from the moral obligation to care and bring peace and be loyal to special foreign relations.

Next, we explored whether party ideology modulates moral appeals to particular subcategories of external relations.⁴ Figure 2.2 shows the mean proportion of moral appeals in manifesto statements referring to external relations, split between mainstream and populist parties. Across ideological lines, we find that the majority of statements relating to peace are moralized, with a particular emphasis on the Care/Harm foundation. Notably, populist parties also largely moralize statements mentioning foreign special relationships, particularly with a focus on the Loyalty/Betrayal foundation and positive moral appeals. In contrast, mainstream parties mostly use positive moral appeals when discussing peace, whereas populist parties tend to use more negative moral appeal when referring to peace.

⁴To reduce the number of subcategories, we grouped together positive and negative dimensions.

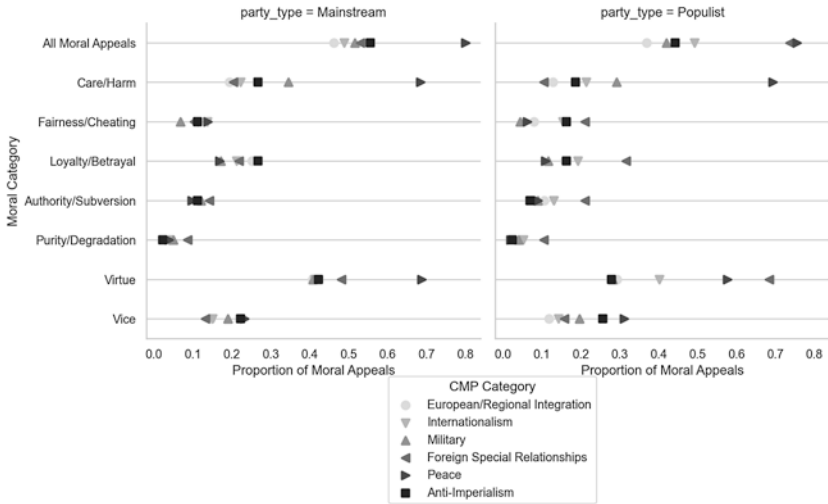


Fig. 2.2 Proportion of moral appeals in manifesto statements discussing external relations. *Note.* $N_{\text{Mainstream}} = 14,795$, $N_{\text{Populist}} = 3068$. Symbols denote the proportion of manifesto statements of each external policy issue containing a moral appeal

While these descriptive analyses provide an overview of the popularity of certain moral appeals in specific policy issues, multivariate analyses are needed to examine how ideological differences shape moralization of policy issues (RQ2). Figure 2.3 plots the result of logistic regression analysis regressing different moral appeals on the categorization of the party as mainstream (0) or populist (1). We control for length of the manifesto, year, country, and sentiment. When considering all policy issues, our results largely replicate those reported by Bos and Minihold ((2022); Fig. 2.2): populist parties are significantly more likely to use appeals to Authority/Subversion (OR: 1.13) and negative moral appeals (OR: 1.19), whereas the probability that their manifesto statement contains positive moral appeals decreases 0.91 times (Fig. 2.3, top left).

However, when discussing external relations (Fig. 2.3, bottom right), populists are actually less likely to use any moral appeals (OR: 0.84) or appeals to Fairness/Cheating (OR: 0.81), Loyalty/Betrayal (OR: 0.63), as well as positive moral appeals (0.70), answering RQ2. Instead, populists tend to focus their moralization on internal issues referring to social

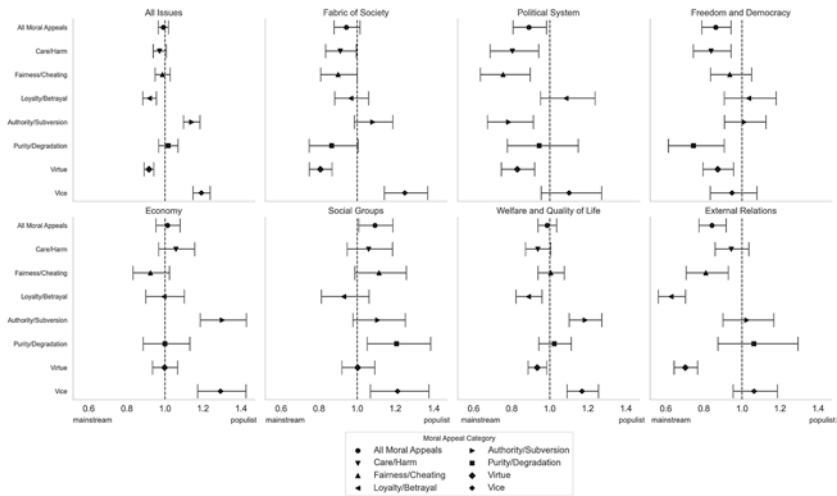


Fig. 2.3 Moral appeals in manifesto statements by policy issue and ideological dimension. *Note.* Results of logistic regression analyses. Coefficients are odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals, representing the likelihood of a manifesto statement for a particular policy issue to contain a (specific) moral appeal dependent upon the party's populist versus mainstream status. Controlled for length of manifesto, year, country, and sentiment

groups (OR: 1.09); discuss social groups more via appeals to Purity/Degradation (OR: 1.21); and generally are more likely to use negative moral appeals when discussing the fabric of society (OR: 1.25), the economy (OR: 1.29), social groups (OR: 1.21), or the quality of life (OR: 1.17). In other words, the moralization of foreign policy issues is driven by mainstream, not populist parties. A potential explanation for these findings might be that mainstream parties are less bound to mobilize across groups in foreign policy statements than in statements on domestic policies. This possibly allows them to more freely moralize their statements, outlining differences with foreign outgroups—something that could be regarded as ‘mainstreaming populism’. Analogously, populist parties may be reluctant to moralize foreign policy statements because international politics does not always directly map onto the people/elite divide that is so central to populism: the people-as-underdog are sometimes extended

tend to use moral rhetoric when emphasizing the nation (österreich), togetherness (gemeinsame), and Europe (europäische; europa), whereas populists rather moralize discussions focused on security (sicherheit), compliance (erfüllung), and cohesion (zusammenhang). In contrast, mainstream parties in the United Kingdom moralize foreign policy issues concerned with labour, support, and continuity, whereas their populist opponents use more moral language when discussing the referendum associated with Brexit and the EU. Analogously, mainstream parties in both Germany and the Netherlands use more moral rhetoric when situating the nation in the context of foreign policy, whereas populist parties in these countries focus moral language on specific international issues (Germany: *frieden, krieg, hilfe*; Netherlands: *israel versus palestijnse, terrorisme*).

To address our third research question, we examined whether populists are more likely to moralize particular subcategories of external relations compared to mainstream parties. Accordingly, we again employed a series of logistic regression analyses for each policy subdivision of external relations, regressing different moral appeals on the categorization of the party as mainstream (0) or populist (1), controlling for length of the manifesto, year, country, and sentiment (Fig. 2.5). Notably, we find that populists are only more likely to use appeals to Purity/Desecration when discussing internationalism (OR: 1.41) and appeals to Care/Harm (OR: 1.44) and general negative moral appeals (OR: 1.50) when discussing peace. In contrast, the likelihood that populist parties use general moral appeals decreases when they mention European/regional integration (OR: 0.71) and the military (OR: 0.69), and this effect extends over specific moral appeals referring to Care/Harm, Fairness/Cheating, Loyalty/Betrayal, and to general positive moral appeals. Lastly, it must be noted that class imbalances exist across policy issues (Fig. 2.5, bottom right), with fewer manifesto statements per external relation subdivision for populist than mainstream parties, explaining the rather large confidence intervals across models.

In general, differences in populist foreign policy preferences follow the thick ideology that is attached to populism. While it would have been an interesting avenue to compare the moralization of external policy issues of left- and right-wing populists, the small number of populist statements on foreign policy did not allow this.

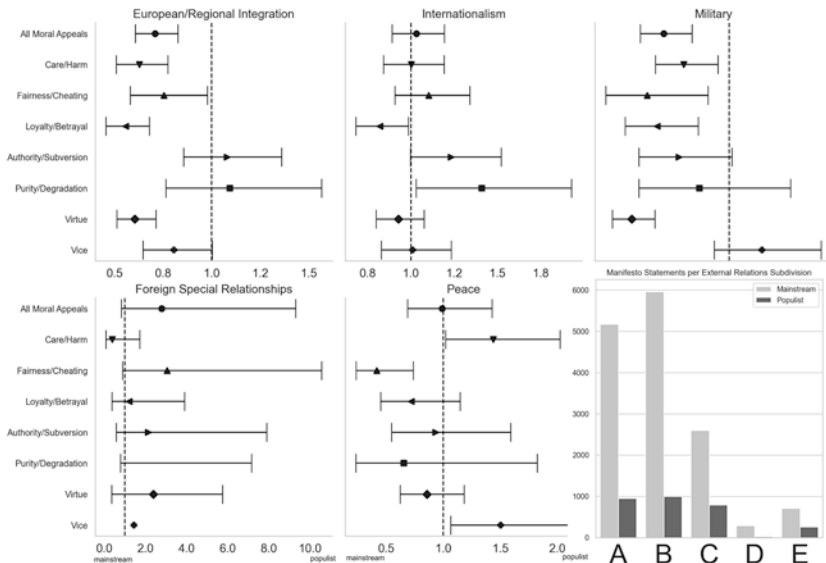


Fig. 2.5 Results of logistic regression analyses for moral appeals in manifesto statements by external relation subcategory and ideological dimension. *Note.* Coefficients are odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals, representing the likelihood of a manifesto statement for a particular policy issue to contain a (specific) moral appeal dependent upon the party's populist versus mainstream status. Controlled for length of manifesto, year, country, and sentiment. Bottom right chart displays frequency counts for each subcategory by ideology (A = European/Regional Integration, B = Internationalism, C = Military, D = Foreign Special Relationships, E = Peace)

CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the extent to which foreign policy issues are moralized by populist and non-populist parties. We used the Moral Foundations Dictionary (MFD) to gauge the use of (different) moral words in party manifesto statements on different policy issues ($n = 215,625$ statements). Our study shows that, overall, political parties in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom moralize statements on foreign policy more than statements on other policy domains, with the exception of policies on 'the fabric of society'. However, populist parties are not more likely to moralize policy statements on *foreign* issues. Zooming in on

specific issues, we can discern a more nuanced picture, in line with Petris' findings in this book. Policy statements on European integration and Defense (Military) are generally more moralized by mainstream parties, in both cases using moral words related to Care/Harm, Fairness/Cheating, and Loyalty/Betrayal. With regard to policies on Internationalism, Foreign Special Relationships, and Peace, the moral framing is more mixed. While mainstream parties are more likely to refer to Loyalty/Betrayal concerns when discussing Internationalism, populist parties instead emphasize on Purity/Degradation. And while mainstream parties refer to fairness considerations in their reflection on peace policy, populist parties refer to Care/Harm more and mainly use negative moral words. Future research might look at other corpora to compare partisan foreign policy statements, such as proceedings from the European Parliament or national parliaments, or speeches in supranational institutions, such as the United Nations. In addition, a limitation to our findings is our reliance on a word-count based dictionary for detecting moral appeals in text. Despite its popular application, recent work has highlighted several shortcomings of the MFD, such as its small vocabulary and the reliance on ostensibly moral words selected by a few domain experts (Hopp et al., 2021). Accordingly, future work should triangulate our findings using recently introduced moral sentiment detection tools that aim to remedy these limitations.

Overall, our chapter shows that communication on foreign policy issues lends itself to moralization, more than most of the other policy domains, and even in scripted party manifestos. While populist parties do not moralize foreign policy statements more, our analyses show that there are nuanced differences between populist and mainstream parties in their statements on foreign policy.

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Populist Communication and Foreign Policy in a Competitive Authoritarian Context

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This chapter aims to expand our knowledge of populist electoral communication and foreign policy in the context of competitive authoritarianism, with a focus on Africa. In this chapter, I draw on the literatures on populist communication, competitive authoritarianism, and populism and International Relations, to conduct a study of the strategic role of populist communication about foreign policy, specifically about foreign aid, in advancing competitive authoritarianism during times of election. on the African continent, with examples from Uganda's most recent election in January 2021. Despite being a fast-growing field of academic inquiry, the nature and manifestations of populism in different national contexts on the African continent are understudied, even as populism as a political strategy and post-truth politics have arguably been endemic in Africa in the recent past (Gherghina et al., 2013; Trotter & Maconachie, 2018).

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Destradi and Plagemann (2019) systematically examine the conditions under which populist incumbents in several countries in the Global South can contribute to more conflict prone bilateral relations, a weakening of global governance and its institutions, and a more centralised and personalised foreign policymaking. They find that populists in power tend to reinforce existing trends in world politics rather than change course entirely. Their foreign policymaking becomes more centralised and personalised, but strong ‘thick’ ideologies determine it, reducing arbitrariness and unpredictability. In an earlier study, Plagemann and Destradi find that Modi’s populist government has not had the expected impact on the substance of foreign policy; rather, it has had an impact on the procedural aspects of foreign policymaking as well as its communication (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019). In their chapter in this volume, Destradi et al. argue also that populists, including in countries of the Global South, tend to use more confrontational language in their diplomatic relations with other states. Relatedly, Thiers and Wehner in this volume also find that left-wing and right-wing populist leaders in Latin America differ considerably in their political attitudes towards international cooperation, both compared to mainstream leaders as well as compared to each other.

In Africa, recent manifestations of contemporary populism include movements such as Raila Odinga’s *Orange Democratic Movement* in Kenya, Julius Malema’s *Economic Freedom Front* in South Africa, and Abdoulaye Wade’s *Parti Democratique Senegalais* in Senegal. However new the social and political problems they respond to, these contemporary populist leaders and their political movements are grounded in a decade-long tradition of populist politics in the Sub-Saharan region. As early as the 1970s and 1980s, *coups d’etats* shook the region, such as the ‘populist-socialist movement’ coordinated by Captain Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso (1983–1987) and the ‘social revolution’ by Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings in Ghana (1981–2000) (Rothchild & Gyimah-Boadi, 1989). The success of these movements culminating in coups has largely been attributed to their charismatic populist leaders and their successful campaigns run on anti-corruption agendas (Nugent, 2012).

In other national contexts, like Idi Amin’s Uganda (1971–1979) and Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe, populist politics exploited a discourse informed by ethno-Nationalist sentiments, instigating xenophobia and creating rifts between socio-cultural groups in society (Trotter & Maconachie, 2018). Despite differences due to national context, populist leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa tend to share certain core ideational and

discursive elements with other populists around the world. They often have a charismatic leadership style, synonymous with their claim to a non-elite personal background. They prove that they are closer to the ‘people’ they seek to represent by emphasising that they do not originate from the existing political class (Carbone, 2005). Some of the success of populists on the African continent is linked to their capacity to use public communication to exaggerate national problems, like inequality, underdevelopment, and poor economic performance, linking them to the policies of previous governments and the unsound advice of foreign experts (Lemarchand & Young, 1985, p. 253). Like other populist leaders, they often call for the reinstatement of the ‘power to the people’ and employ plebiscitarian approaches, advancing political strategies that condemn failures of governance due to the corruption of existing governments (Thomson, 2016).

In fragile democracies, as was the case in Latin America, successful populists have been found to drive their countries into competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky, 2017). Despite this key finding, we know very little about the specific strategies that populists in competitive authoritarian contexts use to advance and ultimately consolidate their political agenda, particularly when elections take place. A type of long-term ‘hybrid regime’, competitive authoritarianism is understood to recognise some democratic institutions in the exercise of political authority, but at the same time incumbents in these regimes violate these rules so often and so extensively that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy (Levitsky & Way, 2002).

Counter to existing scholarship on populists in the Global South, I propose that left-or-right thick ideology might have a much more limited effect on the electoral behaviour of a populist leader in a competitive autocracy in an African setting. This applies also to their communication about foreign policy and can hold true for both incumbents and new presidential candidates.

At the level of public communication, populists’ discourse has been found to map onto the left-right spectrum of ‘thick’ political ideology, at least in Europe and North America. Right-wing populists complement this ‘thin’ veneer with a set of exclusionary political ideas. They propose a racialised, nativist view of the ‘people’ that perceives cultural, religious, linguistic, and racial minorities as threatening (Bonikowski, 2017; Canovan, 1999; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013a, b). They oppose ‘out-of-control’ government, and tend to maintain economically interventionist

and authoritarian, socially conservative positions (Mudde, 2017). On the left side of the ideological spectrum, populists use language hostile to the rich, financial elites, and big corporations (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013a, b, 2017; Plattner, 2010). They promote an agenda inclusionary of the Main Street and opposed to financial corporations and interests, with a progressive social-justice agenda (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). In general, left-wing populists tend to rely primarily on economic claims, whereas politicians on the right favour Nationalist claims (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016).

The scholarship on populism and foreign policy as well as on the intersection of populism and International Relations is rapidly growing. As also discussed in the introduction to this volume (Lacatus et al., Chap. 1), populism and International Relations are inter-connected, and this relationship is visible in the ways populist leaders engage in foreign policy, in the electoral discourse of populist candidates about foreign policy, as well as in the impact that populist politics may have on existing institutions of global governance (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019; Lacatus, 2021; Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021; Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017). Some studies focus on populist parties in coalition governments (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017) and others address the relationship between populism and foreign policy with a clear preference for Western politics, a more narrow focus on populist radical right parties outside government in Europe (Liang, 2007), or an emphasis on the personalities of ‘angry’ populist leaders (Drezner, 2017). Verbeek and Zaslove (2017) propose a study of populist political parties drawing from a range of Western and Latin American cases, including a typology of populist foreign policy positions in four areas: regional integration, trade and finance, migration, and ‘general attitude’. They find that foreign policy positions vary across populist parties (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017), demonstrating that populists’ thick ideology matters more. Chrysosgelos proposes that populists’ notion of protecting the ‘people’ can explain their suspicion of international institutions (Chrysosgelos, 2017). Several contributions to this volume analyse the interplay between populism and thick ideology in different national contexts around the world, offering a wealth of evidence in support of populist leaders’ use of communication about foreign policy and international politics, to advance strategic political and electoral purposes (Bos et al., Chap. 2; Tamaki & Venturelli, Chap. 14; Thiers & Wehner, Chap. 6; Frahm & Lehmkuhl, Chap. 8; Coticchia & Verbeek, Chap. 7; Petris, Chap. 5; Ketola & Odmalm, Chap. 9; Cadier, Chap. 5; all in this volume).

As a ‘thin-centred ideology’, populism is chameleonic in nature (Taggart, 2000) and can be attached to other ideologies (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013a, b). As observed in Europe and the Americas, the three core concepts of populism (the people, the elite, and the general will) and the two direct opposites (elitism and pluralism) can be integrated with other thick (e.g. socialism or illiberalism) or thin (e.g. ecologism) ideologies to advanced political agendas on both sides of the political spectrum (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013a, b).

In a Latin American context, populism has been found to increase the likelihood that fragile democracies will break down into competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky, 2017). As political outsiders, populists lack the necessary experience to effectively utilise the institutions of representative democracy and, when they have not been socialised into pursuing goals within democratic politics, they might also lack a normative commitment to those institutions (Levitsky, 2017). Moreover, successful populist candidates win elections on the promise of critiquing the political establishment, hence questioning the existing regime as not truly democratic (Hawkins, 2010) and promising to ‘re-found’ the political system (Levitsky, 2017). They tend to enjoy broad popular support for such reforms once they have come to power. Against this background, newly elected populists are not likely to find great support for their agendas inside institutions of horizontal accountability, such as supreme courts or electoral commissions, and sometimes respond to such conflicts with plebiscitarian strategies (Levitsky, 2017).

To advance our understanding of populism in competitive autocracies, particularly in an African setting, I expand on Levitzky and Way’s explanation of divergent regime trajectories and propose a conceptualisation of populism as a key intervening factor determining regime consolidation in competitive autocracies. I propose that the examination of populist communication offers valuable insight into the political trajectories of competitive authoritarian regimes, including on the African continent. This complements our existing understanding of the determinants of competitive authoritarianism.

Three explanatory factors—two international and one domestic—account for regimes moving in the direction of (deepened) competitive autocracy or away from it, towards democratisation. First, *linkage to the West* refers to the linkage between competitive autocratic regimes and Western states, be it economic, political, multilateral, or civil society driven. Linkage is the sole factor that can account for successful

democratisation (Levitsky & Way, 2010: 306). Second, *Western leverage* is the overall vulnerability that competitive authoritarian regimes might have to the external pressure that Western powers apply to initiate democratisation. Vulnerability alone is very unlikely to result in effective democratisation. With very few exceptions, leverage is considered high in African countries. Third, *organisational power* refers to each government's capacity to suppress democratic opposition, through using state coercive power, ruling party strength, and state control over the economy (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Organisational power is an independent variable where African states show the greatest variation (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

Slater (2011) argues that linkage, leverage, and organisational power do not causally interact, but they do follow in a logical sequence, which is not truthful to all forms of democratisation taking place around the world. Importantly, what we lack is a theory of democratisation in the context of 'low linkage', which is the case with most African countries. In the DRC, for instance, Matti finds that the country will remain a competitive autocracy and that the balance of Western aid and Chinese investment determines whether the country fluctuates between more democratic or more authoritarian politics (Matti, 2010). More recently, scholars have found that, along donor dynamics, domestic actors play an equally important role in Africa, further inhibiting democratisation (Peiffer & Englebert, 2012) and shaping the outcomes of elections (Bogaards & Elischer, 2016; Elischer, 2013; Lebas, 2011; Weis, 2014; Wiseman, 1990).

In Uganda's case, the incumbent regime has also recently been shown to be a competitive autocracy, relying on coercion to resist opposition challenges through NRM's creation of elaborate military and paramilitary security structures meant to maintain effective command and control (Kagoro, 2016). From the start, the NRM was a politically weak but militarily strong organisation (Kagoro, 2012; Mwenda, 2007), with Museveni largely utilising the military wing as a guarantor of his power and political order (Mudoola, 1991). Some scholars have also proposed that NRM's shallow political base was the driver of the ban on multiparty politics between 1986 and 2005 (Omara-Otunnu, 1998; Tripp, 2004).

Thirty-five years after he came to power, Museveni continues to enjoy popular support, largely thanks to his astute use of 'soft power' including his responsiveness to popular concerns during his poverty tours and distribution of development resources, his manipulation of popular fears about instability and a return to the 'bad old days', and his treatment of the opposition (Golooba-Mutebi & Hickey, 2016). Museveni's regime started

in 1986 when the NRM entered the capital city, Kampala, and ended a civil war that had been going on for nearly five years. By the time he came to power, he had already delivered what many Ugandans still credit him for—a sudden and dramatic shift from chaos to stability, moving from years of violence towards security and a peaceful relationship between soldiers and the citizenry (Carbone, 2005, p. 5). Despite having been active in local politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Museveni successfully promoted a public self-image as an outsider in politics when he became a figure in national politics. His decision to go to the bush and mount a guerrilla war in 1981 helped to restyle him as a political outsider (Carbone, 2005, p. 4). Museveni gained in popularity during the conflict, emerging as an almost mythic personality (Trotter & Maconachie, 2018). He continued to advance a ‘pro-people’ discourse, emphasising his personal peasant background and his unique personality as a trustworthy ‘outsider’, who was well-prepared to make a clean break from traditional politics grounded in corruption (Canovan, 1999).

Arguably unique to Museveni is his ability to foster a public image of an authentic leader ‘of the people’, which appeals to the common person and advances his own unparalleled national developmental narratives (Trotter & Maconachie, 2018). His public communication promotes a vision of a transformed Ugandan society grounded in modernisation, infrastructural development, and equality. Recent years have seen an intensification of Museveni’s use of ‘post-truth politics’ as a populist instrument, relying on an overly optimistic discourse of his regime’s developmental achievements (Trotter & Maconachie, 2018). While this discourse has helped to legitimise his leadership, his public communication ultimately failed to mask fully the observable reality of poor governmental performance, as is the case for instance in the electricity sector (Trotter & Maconachie, 2018).

In their electoral communication ahead of the January 2021 election, both Wine and Museveni relay a sense of consistency with populist rhetoric familiar to their voters (however different thematically, as discussed below), which places ‘the people’ at its centre and makes meeting ‘people’s needs’ the goal. To that end, combating domestic corruption is central to both their campaigns, and so is the promotion of a Nationalist identity presented as important in the regional context of pan-African solidarity, even as the actors who make up the corrupt elite are different for the two candidates.

Wine and Museveni grant foreign policy a central role in their populist electoral communication, with a broad purpose of indicating a strong

linkage to the West and a commitment to democratisation as well as the recognition of the continued leverage that the West has in shaping the politics of the country towards democracy. This strategic approach to communicating about foreign aid is independent of the two candidates' true political intention of moving the country in the direction of democratisation after the election. As I will discuss in more detail below, while they both value foreign aid and the support of international partners to advance politics in Uganda, Wine heavily criticises the financial support that the United States and other Western donors grant Museveni's government and points to this support as one of the main factors keeping the dictatorship alive for so long. Still, Wine does turn to international support for his candidacy, seeking not to alienate international donors and presenting himself as the better candidate to support. Museveni acknowledges international support as a badge of honour for his presidency, legitimising his regime.

In general, populist incumbents in competitive autocracies centre their strategic communication on advancing the tried-and-tested tropes that ensured their political success for many years, including in the realm of foreign policy (Lacatus, 2021; Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021, 2022). Populist communication does not map well onto a left-right ideological spectrum, and candidates can use it strategically to signal to foreign donors and international partners their strong linkage with the West. This does not mean that the candidates' promise of a strong linkage with the West will result in a true commitment to democratisation after the election. In fact, the majority of African countries have generally been considered to have 'low linkage' with the West (Bogaards & Elischer, 2016). What matters, however, is the rhetorical commitment to the tropes that have ensured the provision of foreign aid over the years. Far more important is the continued advancement of ideas that ensured the longevity of their leadership, including Nationalist tropes, references to the 'golden era' of the first time they acceded to power. Their political discourse is often anchored in Nationalist tropes and a strong regional (in our case, African) identity and complemented by the promise of future economic prosperity and development with Western support, primarily through development aid.

Museveni's populism is grounded in political personalisation based on anti-institutionalism that, in turn, leads to further personalisation of state power. His political success has been strengthened by his institutional reform, creating new local government and legislative institutions between 1986 and 1996, which allowed him at the same time to concentrate power

and to personalise it further (Muhumuza, 2009; Mwenda, 2007; Tripp, 2005). These institutions have lacked independence, serving propagandistic purposes (Muhumuza, 2009; Trotter & Maconachie, 2018). Museveni has increasingly disregarded the authority of institutions like the Parliament, the judiciary, the media (Mwenda, 2007), and the army (Tangri & Mwenda, 2003) refusing to delegate power to them. Over the years, Museveni has used, on the one hand, force and intimidation and on the other, patronage (Tangri & Mwenda, 2003) to silence any dissenting voices, using state funds to 'recruit support, reward loyalty, and buy off actual and potential opponents' (Mwenda, 2007). What at first was a 'no party' model of governance justified as a transitional action to modernise the country, proved to be an effective measure to shut down all political opposition and concentrate the country's leadership and constitution around Museveni's personal authoritative guideline (Carbone, 2005). In response to international and inter-party pressures, the government initiated a programme of constitutional reforms in 2005, which introduced a multiparty system and, at the same time, removed term limits on the presidency. With the open support of 213 (out of 305) members of Parliament who accepted bribes, Museveni used the process of constitutional reform to effectively grant himself life-long powers (Tripp, 2005).

In the months leading up to the January 2021 election, Museveni makes strategic use of electoral communication with a twofold goal: domestically, he aims to create a public image of himself as an approachable leader, of 'the people', who has demonstrated a long-standing capacity to keep Uganda out of cross-border conflict; internationally, he strategically communicates his intention to signal a strong linkage with the West and to deliver a future consolidated democracy in Uganda. His electoral discourse stands in stark contrast to the reality of decades-long competitive authoritarianism, unmitigated political and military violence, or the use of organisational force described by his counter-candidate and by other sources (Abrahamsen & Bareebe, 2021).

In his campaign communication, Museveni boasts a strong relationship with Western powers. On 8th November, he reacts to the confirmed election of Joe Biden in the United States of America on Twitter, stating his intention to continue cooperation with the United States, motivated by shared values and loyalty grounded in the African roots of African-Americans, and states openly his hope to maintain a similar special relationship on trade and development during the Biden administration: 'Previous American Presidents have already positively used these linkages

by putting in place the African Growth And Opportunity Act that has given 6,500 types of African goods, quota & tax-free access to the US. We salute this policy & hope that President Biden maintains it', continuing with the following tweets: 'President-Elect of the USA. Congratulations and greetings from the People of Uganda. The USA, with its black population of 47.4m people, as well as a large Christian population linked with us by faith, could easily be a natural ally of Uganda and Africa'.

With the intent to signal a strong linkage with the West, Museveni considers Uganda to be a democratic state and actively promotes economic development and the continuation of international aid for the development of Uganda's infrastructure, food, and financial security, as well as a solution to large-scale unemployment. In his eyes, this is a tried-and-tested approach to meet 'people's needs' that continues practices that have been commonplace during Museveni's rule—international development projects in the fields of infrastructural and agricultural development have traditionally resulted in large handouts to individual households in the vicinity of these projects as well as to gifts of money to small businessmen (Carbone, 2005; Titeca & Flynn, 2014). Moreover, handouts have also been key to Museveni maintaining the patronage system in place to secure the loyalty of NRM politicians at the local level (Vokes & Wilkins, 2016).

By contrast, a populist counter-candidate in a competitive autocracy uses electoral communication strategically, to condemn the existing ruling elites as well as to signal a strong linkage with the West, a clear promise of democratisation, and a willingness to recognise the leverage that the West has in promoting democracy. The long-standing incumbent and the international structures in place to support them represent the embodiment of the corrupt and dangerous elite they seek to replace and to secure their people from. By contrast, they are the authentic leaders representing the will of the people to move away from authoritarianism and in the direction of democracy. In a sense, the candidate running against a long-standing incumbent is compelled to adopt a more 'flexible' stance to his critique of international elites, to mitigate the potential risk of estranging foreign support in the event they do win the elections. In the event they come to power, they will require the support of international development assistance to implement economic programmes. They are thus compelled to both critique the international support offered to the incumbent and to make claim to this support. As the below discussion will show, this was the case in Uganda's most recent election, too.

Voices opposing Museveni have emerged in the past two decades, but none have been successful at defeating the long-standing president. In 2021, the most prominent dissenting voice was of Bobi Wine (i.e. Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu), member of Parliament, the leader of the National Unity Platform (NUP) political party, and a well-known hip-hop artist. His electoral image is grounded in his otherwise humble personal background in Wine's lack of political experience, which is presented as a guarantee of his integrity and lack of corruption. In 2017, Wine announces his candidacy for Parliament in a by-election for Kyadondo County East constituency, carrying out a unique door-to-door campaign leading to his surprising victory by a wide margin against two experienced counter-candidates, Sitenda Sebalu (NRM) and Apollo Kantinti of the main opposition party, Forum for Democratic Change (Nantume, 2007; Zane & Bakibinga, 2017).

In July 2019, Wine announces his presidential bid in the 2021 general election and in 2020, he formally joins the National Unity Platform Party, growing out of the People Power Movement (Athumani, 2019). The 2021 elections were some of the least free/fair, and the most violent the country had seen (Abrahamsen & Bareebe, 2021). After the official nomination on 3 November 2020, Wine was arrested several times and members of his campaign killed and arrested, events which sparked several widespread demonstrations around the country, resulting in several over 100 deaths, multiple injured people, and over 2000 incarcerated (Athumani, 2019; Kasasira, 2020). In his communication, Wine's fight for survival during the campaign is presented as symbolic of the struggle that the country faces when seeking to remove Museveni from power and instate a democratic state. On 16 January, the electoral commission confirmed that Museveni won re-election with 58.6% of the vote. Wine did not accept the results, claiming that the election was 'the most fraudulent' in Uganda's history (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Wine's presidential platform advances a populist agenda motivated by 'people power' and intends to create a system of 'people-centred governance' as a solution to poverty, inequality, and, through fair and free elections to achieve the ultimate peaceful transition of power (National Unity Platform, 2020). Aiming to stop Museveni's rule and highlighting the failures of its government over the years, Wine's electoral agenda advances liberal democratic principles as well as economic and social development. Motivating the need for political change: 'It is only through People-centred Governance that Ugandans can be guaranteed Equal Access to

Quality Education and Health Services, Inclusive Economic Development, Land, Natural Resources & Environmental Protection and National Security and International Relations. [...] Poor International Relations will lead us further into debt and our economy will be dominated by those we owe money that we cannot repay' (National Unity Platform, 2020, p. 2).

In contrast to Museveni's campaign, Wine does not see Uganda's internationally funded economic development policies as a sign of successful government policies or as a fortunate result of good collaborations of government with international donors. He condemns Museveni's alleged strong linkage to the West as dishonest and a clear danger to the survival of the Ugandan people. On 23rd November, he tweets: 'Health in Kyegegwa District. (UBOS Census Report of 2014). 47.6% households were found to be 5 km or more to the nearest health facility, 6.1% homes had access to piped water, 2,752 households had no toilet facility, 90,345 (98.8%) households were not living in decent dwellings'. Wine connects the failure of adequate investment and absorption of development funds into the Ugandan economy to the government's corruption. While future economic development is important in Wine's campaign as well, he focuses on poverty and inequality as direct consequences of the corrupt policies by the Museveni regime. On 18th of December, he continues with a series of three tweets: 'When we pledge better services, e.g. health & educ, some people ask where the money will come from. Truth, money is available, only misused or stolen! e.g. Auditor General's reports show each year since FY 2015/16, we lose average of shs24,909,253,883 in wasteful expenditure. [...] This is 15 times the amount needed to supply all girls in public schools from upper primary to tertiary with sanitary towels for 1 year so they don't miss school! (Wasteful expenditure is when gov't pays penalties or court awards for incompetence, hence less money for services). [...] Eliminating corruption, (not in word but action), increasing efficiency in public administration as well as fostering discipline in the management of public resources would go a long way to improve the well-being of our people. #WeAreRemovingADictator'.

While he criticises Museveni's dishonest treatment of international development aid and his breach of commitment to a strong linkage with the West, Wine does not want to alienate international support or potential future aid, as a promise for more successful economic development in the future. Under the slogan '#WeAreRemovingADictator', Wine uses social media to gather public support domestically as well as international

attention and endorsement for the effort to end Museveni's decades-long rule from power and signals that he indeed is truthfully committed to democratisation in Uganda. In contrast to Museveni, he portrays himself as the candidate who is truly committed to Uganda's democratisation and to honestly working on strengthening the country's linkage with the West. On 3rd of January, Wine tweets: 'Thank you @SenatorMenendez for this important statement on safeguarding democracy in Uganda. Truly grateful to the leaders of the world who are standing with the people of Uganda in our pursuit for democracy and the rule of law'. As such, he aims to be the candidate who opens the West's eyes to the need to stop supporting Museveni's regime and instead direct their support for him as the candidate who is genuinely intending to support democratisation.

Despite his critique of long-standing Western support for Museveni, Wine is compelled to remain open towards the very global governance mechanisms supporting economic development in the country in the event he wins the election and wants to deliver on his campaign promises of further development. Thus, his campaign communication on Twitter is on the one hand challenging existing power structures, calling for the removal of a 35-year dictatorship, and on the other hand reinforcing existing systems of global governance, without presenting a robust policymaking agenda informed by thick ideology. In other words, in line with the observations made by Levitsky and Way about Latin America, the risk of the country remaining a competitive autocracy is high in the case of Wine's potential election or the election of a different opposition candidate with limited political experience.

Despite a significant increase in academic studies of populism, the nature and manifestations of populism outside of the Western world are under-researched, with a very small number of studies focusing on populism on the African continent. Researching populism outside of the Western world, in competitive autocracies, expands our understanding of what populism is, going beyond the paradigm of left-wing and right-wing politics, and nuances our knowledge of what the principal claims to authenticity are that substantiate populist politics, including foreign policymaking, in non-democratic domestic environments. Counter to existing scholarship on populists in the Global South, I argued here that thick ideology might have a much more limited effect on the electoral behaviour of a populist leader in a competitive autocracy, and this applies also to their communication about foreign policy. When it comes to their position on foreign policy and the conduct of International Relations,

strategic electoral communication is largely focused on positioning themselves in relation to the West and signalling a genuine commitment to a strong linkage and true future democratisation. In the case of a long-standing incumbent, like Museveni, electoral communication about a strong linkage with the West and a true commitment to democratising the country stands in stark contrast with the reality of poverty on the ground, the misuse of development aid, and the conduct of autocratic politics. In their turn, counter-candidates like Wine contest a long-standing regime and promise a truthful future commitment to implementing democratisation as well as an authentic and corruption-free linkage with the West if successfully elected. At the same time, even in the event of an electoral victory, the counter-candidate's lack of political experience presents a risk to the future direction of democratisation processes. Moreover, their commitment to a genuine linkage with the West is also likely to reinforce existing global governance power dynamics rather than deliver change on the scale their electoral campaigns promise.

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Populist Representational Practices and Foreign Policy: An Analysis of the Case of Poland

David Cadier

INTRODUCTION

In August 2015, on the eve of taking office as President of the Republic of Poland, the newly elected Andrzej Duda vowed to bring about “corrections, including some profound ones” in the country’s foreign policy, though no “revolution or sudden changes” (Duda, 2015). A few months later, his party, the populist right-wing Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*—PiS), won an absolute majority in the parliamentary elections and seized the other reign of executive power by forming and leading a majority government. It has remained in power ever since, as it won the presidential and parliamentary elections again in 2019. After eight years of PiS rule, it is worth taking stock of the evolution of Poland’s

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foreign policy and to reflect in particular on whether, how and to what extent the party's populist orientation has had an incidence.

Duda's pledge is at least partly realized: there has been no 'revolution' in Poland's foreign policy, no major or substantive change of direction on its crucial topics or with regard to its key pillars. The PiS government's policy choices on the US, Russia or NATO are very much in line with those of its predecessors and, in spite of its harsh anti-EU rhetoric, it has not come close to putting into question the country's EU membership (see for instance: Lanoszka, 2020). At the same time however, some alterations are notable in terms of foreign policy *practice* or how policies are represented, communicated and incarnated. Many of these alterations hardly qualify as deliberate and conscious 'corrections' though, as in several instances the foreign policy results obtained on a given dossier *diverged* from the PiS government's stated foreign policy objectives. That is, under the PiS government, foreign policy outputs and outcomes often appeared uncontrolled or unintended—or more precisely seemed to be subsumed and fell victim to its domestic political practice. For instance, although the strengthening of the bilateral link with the US and the promotion of Ukraine's euro-Atlantic integration has counted among its main strategic priorities, the PiS government's populist-inspired historical policy had strained relations with both Washington and Kyiv during its first term. Added to abrasive comments and diplomatic gaffes on the part of PiS policy-makers, the government's performances thus seemed at times to run counter to its own foreign policy preferences. More profoundly, although not necessarily intended for the foreign policy level, these practices and performances contribute to shape the context in which Polish foreign policy is formulated, debated and implemented. Their productive and generative power is notably reinforced by the party's longevity in power, its "colonization of politico-institutional structures" (Bill & Stanley, 2020, 378) and its propagandistic use of public media.

The unintended, performative and structural effects of populism on foreign policy tend to escape the attention of the nascent, yet vibrant, scholarship on the topic (for an overview, see: Destradi et al., 2021; Introduction to this collective volume). This has notably to do with the fact that most studies rely on the ideational approach to populism: they shed interesting light on how populist ideas, beliefs and mental maps translate into certain foreign policy preferences and dispositions, that, in turn, inform or influence foreign policy outputs and processes. By definition though, the focus on preferences ignores the unintended. More

profoundly, works grounded in the ideational approach mainly study populist discourse as a (neutral) medium of populist ideas and, as such, tend to overlook its performative effects on foreign policy structures. At the same time however, the scholarship that does take on board the productive nature of populist practices and provide rich accounts of how they are produced and reproduced in international politics generally stops short of investigating the implications for foreign policy. They elucidate how populist discourse, communication and performance contribute to promote, sediment and redefine certain meanings, narrative and identities, but not necessarily how these, in turn, have an effect on foreign policy actions.

In this chapter, populism is understood and studied as a set of discursive and stylistic practices that spill over, are reproduced in and affect foreign policy. As I have argued elsewhere, the influence of populism can be approximated through what post-structuralist scholars term the ‘politics of representation’: by promoting certain representations of Self and Others and by performing a rupture with the technocratic establishment, populist practices have a constitutive effect on the structures of meaning of foreign policy (Cadier, 2021).¹ I apply and expand this framework to examine how the PiS government’s domestic political practices have conditioned, constrained or enabled its foreign policy actions, paying attention to unintended as well as structural (and therefore potentially long-term) effects. From an empirical point of view, the chapter builds on the analysis of official documents, speeches and public statements from the PiS foreign policy executive, as well as on semi-structured interviews with Polish diplomats, governmental advisers and experts that have been used to cross-check the interpretation of the data. The analysis focuses in particular on the first two governments formed by PiS after its 2015 victory, respectively led by Beata Szydło (2015–2017) and Mateusz Morawiecki I (2017–2019) in tracing what might be specific in the party’s populist practices and how they are projected onto foreign policy, but the analysis of the constitutive effects on foreign policy is necessarily broader and extends to the whole period where PiS has been in power (2015–2022).

The chapter begins with setting forth a framework to investigate the constitutive effects of populist practices on foreign policy. Subsequently, the empirical section distinguishes between various patterns in the PiS government’s foreign policy and the influence of the populist politics of

¹ A significant share of the theoretical and empirical discussion in this chapter draws from this article.

representation. In some instances, the PiS government has contested, and sought to redefine, some of the core representations, identities and role conceptions in Polish foreign policy tradition, and this has in turn delimited the realm of the possible for its policies. In other instances, the PiS government has claimed Poland's foreign policy tradition, but its domestic political practice has entered in tension with this tradition as well as its own foreign policy objectives, leading to conceptual contortions and policy backlash. Finally, the reliance on populist stylistic performances and the marginalization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has fed transgressions of diplomatic norms and diplomatic incidents.

The case and approach chosen allow this chapter to make an empirical and theoretical contribution to the scholarship investigating the relationship between populism and foreign policy and to the literature on representational practices in International Relations. The case of Poland is of particular interest on these questions, and yet remains largely understudied (for some exceptions see: Varga & Buzogány, 2021; Cianciara, 2022). It is the biggest country in a Central European region generally regarded as a laboratory of populism in power and one where the populist right-wing PiS had had sufficient time and means to leave its imprint on the country's foreign policy.

POPULIST PRACTICES AND FOREIGN POLICY: FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

In conceptualizing populism as a political practice, I rely on and combine the discursive and stylistic approaches in Comparative Politics (CP) and, in studying their constitutive effects on foreign policy, I build on the post-structuralist scholarship in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). Discourse Analysis provides a common methodological home allowing reuniting these various approaches to the extent that it understands discourse as both structure and (linguistic and non-linguistic) practices (Weldes & Laffey, 2004).

Populism as Discursive and Stylistic Practices Spilling Over onto Foreign Policy

Of the main conceptualizations of populism advanced in the CP literature (i.e. as ideology, strategy, discourse or style), the Laclauian and the

socio-cultural approaches are the most compatible and most fruitfully combinable. Both move the focus from content or motivation to form. Both understand populism as a set of meaning-creating practices and combining them permits enlarging the range and types of practices considered. As showcased in a recent, landmark collective volume, the two approaches taken together allow to study how “populist actors constitute popular political identities through performative practices that range from political speeches to transgressive [stylistic] performances” (Ostiguy et al., 2021, 2).² Especially once populist actors make it to power, foreign policy provides, at the same time, a terrain and a repertoire for the (re)production of these practices. In fact, the comparative analysis of various European cases suggests that, more than their ideas or preferences, what is most distinctive in the foreign policies of populist governments is their discourse and style (see the contributions in: Cadier & Lequesne, 2021).

Following Ernesto Laclau, populism can be conceptualized as a logic of articulation (or discourse) that promotes certain arrangements of meaning and representations of identity (Laclau, 2005a, b). Rather than simply reflecting pre-existing social categories, the populist discourse is actively involved in constituting the categories of ‘elite’ and, especially, ‘people’: it constructs the subject position and political subjectivity of the latter by opposing it to the former (*interpellation*). It does so by establishing a system of relations between signifying elements and promoting and temporarily fixing, as such, certain arrangements of meaning (*articulation*) (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, 105–14; see also: Weldes & Laffey, 2004, 28–29). More specifically, according to Laclau, the populist discourse constructs a chain of equivalence between unsatisfied social demands and creates an internal frontier dichotomizing the social into two antagonistic camps, the people as underdog and the elite as power establishment.

The populist logic of articulation can be projected and reproduced in foreign policy in two ways. On the one hand, populist actors tend to convoke issues and actors of international politics in their articulatory practice of *othering* domestic elites and interpellating the people as ‘underdog’. For instance, Thorsten Wojcewski has shown how Donald Trump and Narendra Modi have “used foreign policy as a platform for the (re) production of a collective identity of the people” and have “grouped

²This is especially true if, as the authors suggest, we move beyond Laclau’s strictly bottom-up approach to adopt a relational one—and, I would add, if we drop the normative dimension present in Laclau’s (especially later) works.

together establishment and foreign Others [as] collaborative ‘enemy of the people’” (Wojczewski, 2019a, b). On the other hand, populist actors are likely to displace and apply the mode of articulation (or structure) of the populist discourse to the foreign policy realm: the State is then represented as an ‘underdog’ in a given international or regional order and certain foreign powers are *othered* as the ‘elite’ or ‘establishment’ frustrating its legitimate national demands (Cadier, 2021). In both ways, the populist discourse promotes and reproduces certain representations of Self and Others in International Relations as well of, relatedly, the State, its roles and identities. Stated differently, populist discursive practices contribute to shape, appropriate, contest and redefine the constitutive elements of the “national framework of meaning” (Larsen, 1997) on the basis of which foreign policy is articulated, debated and legitimized.

The discursive (Laclauian) approach can be complemented and enriched by the insights of the scholarship conceptualizing populism as a set of performative, stylistic and socio-cultural practices (Moffitt, 2017; Ostiguy, 2017). They focus on the “mediatized nature and aesthetic dimensions of populist performances” (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021, 48), which also contribute to meaning production and the constitution of political identities. These include levels of language, tones, gestures, self-presentation, and dressing—or in other words the *ways* populist actors speak and act in navigating the fields of politics and power (see also the Introduction to this volume). More specifically, the populist style is characterized by the three following features according to Moffitt (2017): an appeal to the ‘people’ as both the audience and the subject performatively embodied and represented; a resort to ‘bad manners’ and coarsened political discourse to mark a distance with the ‘elite’; and a representation of crisis, breakdown and threats feeding a sense of emergency and leading to simplification of the terms of political debate. The reliance on, and incarnation of, the populist political style can be expected to spill over onto the conduct and implementation of foreign policy. In particular, the “championing of ‘common sense’ against the bureaucrats” and the “denial of expert knowledge” (Moffitt, 2017, 52) is likely to lead to the sidelining of Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) and professional diplomats in foreign policy-making. In addition, in performing their “disregard for ‘appropriate’ ways of acting in the political realm” (Moffitt, 2017, 53), populist actors are likely to transgress diplomatic norms by committing gaffes, engaging in offensive rhetoric or indulging in conspiracy theories (see also the chapters by Meibauer, Chap. 12, this volume and Destradi et al., Chap. 15, this

volume). To be sure, the first pattern feeds into, and reinforce, the second, as professional diplomats generally act as gate-keepers and filters of ‘appropriate’ diplomatic practice. In that sense, the stylistic approach allows to capture both direct *and* indirect effects of populism on foreign policy outputs. Overall, the populist political style is likely to translate into unconventional, uncompromising and unbridled diplomacy. As suggested by the scholarship on foreign policy performances, these “embodied, gestural and theatrical aspects of foreign policy” matter in the sense that they are “productive forces in their own right”: they “contribute to performative processes of social construction and subject formation” (Day & Wedderburn, 2022, 2, 4).

In sum, populist discursive and stylistic practices are particularly likely to spill over, be reproduced in, and affect, foreign policy once populist makes it to power and controls the means of public communication and the stage of policy-making. It is important to emphasize, however, that in itself populism is essentially a *domestic political* practice (hence the term chosen of ‘spill over’). The social categories constructed by populist discourse, the socio-cultural elements activated by the populist style, and the political identities constituted by both, are situated in and pertain above all to the domestic (or national) context. But when reproduced at, and from, the level of government, these performative practices are bound to have implications for the conduct, formulation and implementation of foreign policy. We now turn to characterizing these implications and how populist practices might condition or affect foreign policy outcomes.

Populist Practices’ Constitutive and Unintended Effects on Foreign Policy

To capture the constitutive effects of populist practices on foreign policy, the concept of security imaginary appears particularly useful. As defined by Jutta Weldes (1999, 10), this notion refers to the “structure of well-establishing meanings” and “cultural raw materials” out of which representations of international politics, of the State, and of its national interest, emerge. It provides the context in which actors need to articulate their policy preferences, options and choices: as such, it delimits the realm of the possible for policy and enables certain policies while disabling others (Milliken, 1999, 240). At the same time however, the security imaginary is not only conditioning state actors’ practices, but it is also shaped and (re)produced by them. As explained by Weldes (1999, 12), state officials

(and therefore governing populists) are “subjects in both sense of the term”: they engage in meaning construction while at the same time being constrained by the repertoire of meanings available to them. We see then how populist actors’ meaning-creating practices and promotion of new representations of identity can have constitutive significance for how foreign policy is debated, formulated and implemented. Therefore, this chapter aims to discern where, how and to what extent representatives from the PiS government have appropriated, contested or redefined the constitutive elements of the Polish security imaginary. An approach centred on performative practices allows not only to study constitutive, structural and potentially long-term effects, but also collateral and unintended ones. More prosaically, as suggested above, populist stylistic performances are likely to have direct and indirect repercussions on foreign policy and, especially, diplomacy. In this sense, foreign policy might find itself hostage, or a collateral victim, of populist politics. Therefore, this chapter also investigates the correspondence (or lack thereof) between the PiS government’s stated foreign policy preferences and actual foreign policy outcomes (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Summarized theoretical framework

<i>Populist practices</i>	<i>Spill over onto foreign policy</i>	<i>Effects on foreign policy structures</i>
Discursively constructing the ‘people’ as underdog by opposing to the ‘elite’ as power (Laclau) Stylistic appeal to—and embodiment of—the ‘people’ and resort to ‘bad manners’ (Moffitt)	Othering the ‘elite’ by grouping it with foreign others Representing the State as an underdog in international politics Transgression of diplomatic norms and language Championing of common sense against foreign policy bureaucrats	Sedimenting new representations of Self and Other in International Relations (identity) Redefining the constitutive elements of the State’s security imaginary Sidelining of professional diplomats

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE PiS GOVERNMENTS: REDEFINITION, TRANSGRESSION AND BACKLASH

This section analyses the spilling over of PiS populist practices onto Poland's foreign policy. It does so by reviewing the actions, declarations and performances of representatives of the PiS government's foreign policy executive (i.e. President, Prime Minister, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Defense, and their Deputies and relevant advisers). Each time, these discursive and stylistic practices are analysed against the background of, on the one hand, Poland's foreign policy tradition and security imaginary and, on the other hand, the foreign policy results obtained on a given dossier. In terms of issue areas, the focus is notably placed on what has constituted the three core pillars of Polish foreign policy: strengthening strategic links with the US and NATO; deterring Russia and integrating Ukraine in euro-Atlantic structures; consolidating Poland's role in Europe (Zajac, 2017; Zięba, 2020).

Contestation and Redefinition: European Policies

Several analysts converge in their assessment that the PiS government has somehow “departed from” or “broken with” Poland's “traditional pro-EU orientation” (Zwolski, 2017, 171; Jankowski, 2017, 231; Kuźniar, 2016, 11). In the Polish security imaginary, this traditional pro-European orientation and direction has long been incarnated by the narrative of the ‘Return to Europe’, whereby after years of alienation the country was recovering its rightful geopolitical place and cultural identity by adhering to, and becoming a regional leader in, the EU. As articulated by Poland's first post-1989 foreign minister, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, the country's foreign policy tradition was notably established around the objective of strengthening Poland's role in the European core. Through its political discourse and style, the PiS has contested the prevailing narrative of ‘aspiring saint’ and articulated a counter-narrative of “disillusioned rebel” (Cianciara, 2022). More concretely, the PiS government has promoted distinct representations of the EU (negative), of Poland's role in Europe (withdrawing from the mainstream) and of Germany (othering), with implications for Poland's policies and attitude inside the bloc.

Whereas previous Polish governments had traditionally represented the EU as an opportunity, the PiS leadership has often depicted it as a risk or threat (Balcer et al., 2016, 2). On the one hand, PiS policy-makers have described the EU as a failing, and therefore risky ‘utopia’. This is, in fact,

the title of a book that Krzysztof Szczerski (2017), which is generally regarded as one of the main architects of PiS foreign policy, published as he was Secretary of State (and then chief of cabinet) at the Polish Presidency. On the occasion of a conference organized around the publication of that book, the then foreign Witold Waszczykowski went further and characterized the EU as “aberration”.³ On the other hand, the EU and its institutions are represented as a threat to Poland’s sovereignty and traditional values, one that obstructs the will of the Polish people and that pretends to “tell Poland what to believe”.⁴ In this context, the performative intent of ‘taking back control’ has also materialized in symbolic gestures, such as the removal of the EU flag from then Prime Minister’s Szydło weekly press briefing.⁵

In addition, the PiS government has articulated a new vision of Poland and of its place and role in the EU. While the previous government had strived to install Poland as a leading power in the EU core, PiS politicians have largely sought to oppose, and withdraw from, the EU mainstream. In particular, the PiS government has largely articulated its identity in opposition to Germany, which has been totalized as an ontological other in historical and political discourse (Cadier & Szulecki, 2020). PiS intellectuals and politicians castigate Germany as a political and cultural hegemon in Europe, one that encroaches on Poland’s sovereignty through its assets in Polish companies and Polish media, that subverts Polish interests through its power in Brussels, and that obstructs PiS transformative conservative agenda.

This promotion of new representations of the EU and of Poland’s European identity clearly reflects the logic of articulation of populism. In PiS discourse, Poland is represented as an ‘underdog’ that, just as for the people in domestic politics, has been kept down in regional politics and has seen its national demands frustrated by Europe’s ‘establishment’ (i.e. Germany, France and Brussels). Projected and reproduced at the foreign policy level, this logic leads to a redefinition of Poland’s position, image and role in international and European politics. In turn, these

³ ‘The European Union without a hegemon’, *Poland.pl*, 24 February 2017, <https://poland.pl/politics/foreign-affairs/european-union-without-hegemon/>

⁴ Interview with an adviser to the Polish Foreign Minister Waszczykowski, Warsaw, 25 October 2017.

⁵ ‘Poland removes EU flag in Brussels snub’, *Financial Times*, 24 November 2015.

representations and practices inform, enable or disable certain foreign policy behaviour.

First, the PiS government withdrew from, or adopted an uncompromising posture on, a number of collective EU initiatives in the fields of migration, environment and European defence. More than the policy preferences themselves, the manner in which they have been promoted at the EU level has been characteristic and distinctive. On these dossiers and in its dealings with the EU Commission on Rule of Law issues, the Szydło government has adopted “uncompromising” and “confrontational” stances and demonstrated a readiness to “place Poland against the tide of evolution of the entire EU” (Balcer et al., 2017, 31, 35). In other words, the PiS government has often appeared reluctant or unable to fully attune to the EU’s consensus-building processes and compromise-seeking culture. In fact, European diplomats and experts have designated Poland as one of the ‘most disappointing member states’ (along with Hungary and the UK) in a continent-wide survey conducted over the period 2015–2017.⁶ This recalls the image in Europe of the 2005–2007 PiS government, namely that of a “state unable to accept compromise” as the leadership appeared to “show little regard for normal European modes of operation” and as its political style was “amateurish, disjointed and prone to embarrassing outbursts” (Longhurst, 2013, 370). This image had not stuck however, and more generally the constitutive effects of these foreign policy performances had been limited, due to the short amount of time the earlier PiS government stayed in power and, especially, to the successful “aspiring saint” narrative and strategy deployed by the subsequent PO government (2007–2014), who managed to strengthen Poland’s image in the EU (Cianciara, 2022, 88–89). Crucially, in 2005–2007 and contrary to what has been the case since 2015, the PiS had not invested into what Zsolt Enyedi (2020) designates as the ‘technocracy of populism’ (or a ‘populist establishment’), whereby the populist discourse and organizational strategy is not only made compatible with, but in fact put at the service of, the art of governing.

Second, the othering of Germany in political discourse has enabled its downgrading from Poland’s top European partner and affected bilateral diplomatic relations. Upon entering office, the PiS government set a number of “prohibitive” conditions to the bilateral relationship (Kuzniar,

⁶ EU Coalition Explorer, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, London, May 2017, available at https://www.ecfr.eu/page/ECFR209_EU_COALITION_EXPLORER_2017_V2.0.pdf

2016, 13).⁷ After its first year in office, it endeavoured to tone down the rhetoric and adopt a more conciliatory posture towards Berlin, but analysts nevertheless assessed bilateral relations as being “weaker than anytime since 1989” (Buras & Janning, 2018). But more recently, maybe in prevision of the 2023 elections, the PiS government has re-activated and doubled down on its anti-German rhetoric, with the Justice Minister suggesting on Twitter that Germany “has it in its genes” to want and try to “build the Fourth Reich”.

Appropriation and Backlash: Policies Towards the US, Russia and Ukraine

A strong Atlanticist orientation and identity has been a perennial feature of Polish foreign policy (Longhurst & Zaborowski, 2007). The PiS government has largely claimed this tradition and has appropriated the commonplaces, representations and storylines that underpin it. It has vowed to position Poland as Washington’s best ally in the EU. The most symbolic in that sense has been Warsaw’s proposal to host and fund a US military base on its territory, ‘Fort Trump’. Conceived as a bilateral transactional security deal of the kind relished by Donald Trump—and named after him to flatter his ego—this initiative has been consciously pursued outside of the NATO and EU format (Taylor, 2018). In fact, more than its predecessors, the PiS government has not hesitated to pursue a closer bilateral partnership with Washington at the expense of its (Western) European partners. This was, in fact, explicitly stated by then foreign minister Waszczykowski (2018).

At the same time however, the PiS government’s domestic political practice entered in tension with its Atlanticist foreign policy agenda, leading to contortions and backlashes. In the document drafted by the Polish Ministry of Defence to pitch ‘Fort Trump’ to American policy-makers, the initiative is presented as a mean to “preserve western values of freedom and democracy” (in addition to “detering Russia’s aggressive policies” and “help secure American interests in the region”, Politico, 2018), regardless of the fact the PiS government’s judicial reforms were seen and denounced in Washington as an infringement on Rule of Law. More

⁷The four conditions were: the integration of Poland in the Normandy format; the abandonment of the Nordstream 2 pipeline project; the modification of the EU’s climate and energy package; and the granting of minority status to Poles living in Germany.

concretely, some of the PiS governments' domestic policies—such as the 'Holocaust Law' or the closure of the liberal TVN24 channel owned by the American group Discovery—strained relations with Washington. The former, which criminalizes the mention of any (co-)responsibility from the Polish nation in the crimes committed by Nazi Germany, resulted in an American-imposed temporary ban on presidential-level visits.⁸

In the same manner, on Russia, the PiS government's policies stand largely in the continuity of Poland's foreign policy tradition. It has adopted a confrontational attitude towards Moscow and has consistently defended hawkish positions at the EU level. In doing so, it has largely articulated the threat posed by Russia and its own policy responses around core markers of the Polish security imaginary. The anti-Russian stance of the PiS somehow makes it an outlier among European populist radical right parties, but certainly not on the Polish political scene. The PiS has often sought to accuse its predecessor and main political competitor, the Civic Platform (PO), of being soft on, or even of colluding with Russia.⁹ Yet, in reality, the difference between the two parties on Russia is minimal. Probably due to the salience of geopolitical factors, Russia is a dossier in Polish foreign policy where populism and politics more generally has little influence on foreign policy outputs. Warsaw's reaction to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine would most probably have been similar had another party been in power.

The PiS government's discourse on Russia was at times made less audible, however, by its domestic political practices on Europe, to the extent that the same concepts were used to characterize the former's actions in Ukraine and the rule of law infringement procedure launched by EU institutions against Poland. This is true, for instance, of the term 'hybrid war', which the then Defence Minister used to qualify the Summer 2017 street

⁸ 'Trump and Poland: From Love to Hate in Under Nine Months', Daily Beast, 03/09/2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/trump-and-poland-from-love-to-hate-in-under-nine-months>

⁹ In particular, it has regularly claimed that the 2010 Smolensk plane crash, which had taken the lives of President Lech Kaczyński and 95 others travelling on the Presidential plane (i.e. ministers, advisers, army officers, etc), had been orchestrated by Moscow with the complicity, if not help, of the PO government. While the Polish governmental investigation conducted at the time concluded to an accident, the PiS government has chosen to re-open the file and appointed the former (and controversial) Minister of Defence Antoni Macierewicz as head of the new investigation committee. See: <https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/04/10/commemoration-and-controversy-as-poland-marks-tenth-anniversary-of-smolensk-crash/>

protests against his government's reform of the justice system and which the Justice Minister used several times in 2021 to denounce the rule of law probe.¹⁰ Similarly, the Prime Minister compared the EU Commission's withholding of post-pandemic recovery funds to "launching World War 3", which resonated oddly with his later on calls to fight back against Putin Russia's initiation of a new world conflict in Ukraine.¹¹

More saliently, the PiS government's foreign policy objectives towards Ukraine have been deserved by its domestic political practice. An independent and Western-oriented Ukraine is regarded by Polish foreign policy elites as a necessary geopolitical buffer against Russia's power in the region and as being vital for Poland's own security (Zwolski, 2018, 180–81). This vision has notably led Warsaw to be one of the steadiest supporters of Ukraine's accession to NATO and the EU, way before the 2022 invasion. It has not been put explicitly into question by the PiS government, who concretized for instance in 2016 the project of establishing a joint Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian brigade. At the same time however, Polish-Ukrainian relations soured over historical memory and populist and Nationalist initiatives from both sides. In this context, some of PiS policy-makers came to question some of the core narrative and positions of Polish foreign policy tradition. For instance, during a meeting with a right-wing discussion club, the deputy MFA Jan Parys stated that "it is not the case that the existence of Ukraine is a condition for a free Poland ... Ukraine needs Poland, Poland can very well do without Ukraine".¹² Similarly, invoking the example of Greece's policies towards North Macedonia, the Foreign Minister threatened to veto Ukraine's hypothetical future accession to the EU unless Kyiv changes course in its memory policies.¹³

¹⁰ 'Poland's president signs controversial law despite protests', *The Guardian*, 25 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/25/polands-president-signs-controversial-law-despite-protests>; 'EU may "misunderstand system that functions in Poland"', says PM's chief of staff', *Notes from Poland*, 18 September 2021, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2021/09/08/eu-may-misunderstand-system-that-functions-in-poland-says-pms-chief-of-staff/>

¹¹ <https://www.ft.com/content/ac57409d-20c9-4d65-9a5d-6661277cd9af>

¹² Dryjanska, A., 2017. Zdumiewająca wypowiedź szefa gabinetu Witolda Waszczykowskiego. Ukraina długo nam tego nie zapomni, *Natemat*, <https://natemat.pl/224975,zdumiewajaca-wypowiedz-szefa-gabinetu-witolda-waszczykowskiego-istnienie-ukrainy-nie-jest-warunkiem-istnienia-wolnej-polski>

¹³ 'Waszczykowski dla "wSieci" o stosunkach polsko-ukraińskich: Nasz przekaz jest bardzo jasny: z Banderą do Europy nie wejdziecie', *wPolityce.pl*, 3/07/2017, <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/347083-waszczykowski-dla-wsieci-o-stosunkach-polsko-ukrainskich-nasz-przekaz-jest-bardzo-jasny-z-bandera-do-europy-nie-wejdziecie>

*Transgression and Disruption: Foreign Policy Performances
and Diplomatic Practice*

The reliance on populism as a political style and the weakening and sidelining of foreign policy bureaucracy has translated into the transgression of diplomatic norms as well as in several diplomatic incidents. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has largely been sidelined in the foreign policy-making of the PiS government (Kuźniar, 2016, 7). The PiS government has downgraded or marginalized several diplomats that it deemed too close to the previous government and has publicly accused about 66 diplomats of having collaborated with the communist police.¹⁴ Most crucially, the PiS government has adopted a reform that erodes the status of career diplomats and politicizes the Ministry. The reform notably suppresses the diplomatic rank of ‘ambassador’ and makes this function more accessible to political appointees, create a category of ‘foreign workers’ that can become tenured after three years without having to meet the criteria otherwise applied to the diplomatic career, and create a new category of diplomatic secrecy.¹⁵ The reliance on populist stylistic performance on the part of representatives of the PiS foreign policy executive has notably been manifest in the use of disruptive and abrasive language, notably about their European partners. The PiS government’s abrasive statements have often been reflecting the party’s thick ideology (i.e. Nationalist conservative). For instance, the PiS Education Minister stated the Europeans supporting abortion are “neo-Marxists, who have exactly the same Marxist roots as Bolshevik Communism and German National Socialism”.¹⁶

In addition, several representatives of the PiS foreign policy executive voiced conspiratorial statements. President Duda suggested for instance that “liberal-left elites” are trying to remove Poland’s government using people trained by the communist secret services and with support from

¹⁴Interview with a Polish diplomat, Warsaw, 17 October 2017; “De-communisation” leads to Foreign Ministry dismissals’, *Telewizja Polska* (TVP), 23 May 2019, <https://poland-in.com/42757884/decommunisation-leads-to-foreign-ministry-dismissals>

¹⁵‘Projekt ustawy o służbie zagranicznej’, Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland, Adopted in the Council of Minister 21 January 2021, <https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/Projekt-ustawy-o-sluzbie-zagranicznej>

¹⁶RMF24, 2020. Czarnek: Doszliśmy w Europie do poziomu gorszego niż Związek Radziecki i komunizm,

<https://www.rmfm24.pl/fakty/polska/news-czarnek-doszliśmy-w-europie-do-poziomu-gorszego-niz-związek-nId,4880956>

Western Europe.¹⁷ The idea that a ‘hybrid war’ was being waged against Poland from Western Europe and, more generally, the invocation of conspiracy theories was especially associated with then Defense Minister Macierewicz. Finally, several diplomatic gaffes on the parts of members of the PiS foreign policy executive could be cited, such as then Foreign Minister Waszczykowski’s claim that he held diplomatic talks at the UN with the representatives of ‘San Escobar’, a non-existing country, or the then Deputy Foreign Minister Bartosz Kownacki’s statement that Poland had “taught the French how to use a fork” (BBC News, 2016; Washington Post, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shed light on the constitutive, direct and indirect of populist practices on foreign policy. The empirical analysis of the Polish case has revealed some differences across policy areas. With regard to the EU and other EU member states, the PiS government has contested established representations, narratives and role conceptions; it has largely sought to redefine Poland’s European identity and adopted an uncompromising posture inside the bloc. By contrast, on the US, Russia or Ukraine, the PiS government has largely claimed and aligned with Poland’s foreign policy tradition. Yet its domestic political practice entered in tension with this tradition and its own foreign policy objectives, leading to conceptual distortions and policy backlash. Finally, the PiS government’s stylistic performances and sidelining of traditional diplomatic personnel and institutions has often translated in the transgression of diplomatic norms and in diplomatic incidents. As such, the Polish case reveals that populist actors contribute to shaping the structures—whether structures of meaning or institutional structures—in which foreign policy is formulated, justified and debated. This suggests that the effects of populism on foreign policy are susceptible to be long-term and to expand beyond the time of populist rule, but also that they are contingent on populist actors’ representational practices, which vary from one party and one national context to another.

¹⁷NFP, 2020. “Leftist elites” trying to remove Polish government with western support, warns president, 15/11/2020, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/11/15/leftist-elites-trying-to-remove-government-with-western-support-warns-polish-president/>

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“Self-Other, and the Oppositional Discursive Logic behind Populist Foreign Policy. The Case of the Lega Nord”

Federico Petris

INTRODUCTION

The Italian populist party ‘Northern League’ (*Lega Nord*, hereafter LN) was officially founded in 1991 through the merging of several smaller regional parties that were independently operating in Northern Italy, and that shared the ambition of autonomy and self-governance (Biorcio, 1997; Ruzza & Fella, 2009). The individual projects were unified in a single Statute which centred around the shared goal of achieving the independence of the so-called *Macro Regione del Nord*,¹ as clearly expressed in the opening articles of the party’s Statute (Lega Nord, 1991: 1). Thereafter, the party sought legitimation for its demand for autonomy in the claim

¹ Also known as *Macro Regione*, but more commonly referred to as ‘Padania’.

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that the Northern regions hold a distinct identity and culture that “naturally” (Lega Nord, 2014a; Salvini, 2013) sets them apart from the rest of Italy (see Ruzza, 2000). In this regard, the dialects that were (and still are) spoken in the North are presented by the party as the clearest sign of the allegedly ‘natural’ cultural distinctiveness of the people from the North, and the emphasis on the linguistic element is such that scholars interested in the LN case have argued that references to language worked as a crucial referent point for the party, giving to it a unitary vision (Diamanti, 1991, 1993) and ‘glueing’ the party together through the years (Biorcio, 1997). Most pertinent to the present discussion is that the linguistic element forms a composite part of a broader populist rhetoric that builds (discursively) on elements such as the contrast between the frugal, hardworking North and the lazy, spendthrift South (for an analysis, see Biorcio, 1997; for an empirical example, see Salvini, 2013); and the parallel antagonism between the ‘authentic people’ of the North and the “corrupt” (*ladrone*) government in Rome, a government guided by “Ministers of the South” who implement policies that privilege ‘the South’ while ignoring the will of the ‘alpine communities’ (Zaia, 2019). Building from these elements, the literature on populism has presented the LN as a good exemplar of a party that employs a nativist approach, thickening the traditional populism ‘of the right’ (Chrysosgelos, 2017) by defining the authenticity of the people not only on moral criteria but also on claims to naturalness.

Specifically in relation to the foreign policy (hereafter, FP) of the party—understood here as the “intentions and actions of an actor directed at the actor’s external world” (Neack et al., 1995: 18)—the literature on the LN has analysed the party’s FP in terms that resonate with the broader scholarship on populism. That is, scholars have resorted to the “ideological bedfellow” of the movement and posited it as an independent variable to predict its FP positions. This meant that the people vs elite dynamic has been translated linearly from the domestic to international context (for an analysis, see Verbeek & Zaslove, 2015; Woods, 2009), hence treated as a substantive ideology. Contra these expectations, though, the case of the LN shows a complexity that is not readily admissible within the above frameworks as it empirically presents us with a variety of FP preferences that do not fit into the identified linear logic. Exemplary are the 2017 amendments to the party’s Statute – specifically to Art. 1 “Purpose” and Art. 2 “Organisational Structure”. There, the LN opened its agenda towards the “South” in a bid to national government aspirations, but this occurred as members of the party continued to present the South as

‘Other’, and the people from the North as “naturally” distinct from the very communities that the party was now seeking to represent. This problematizes the above expectations, even more so because the changes in FP preference are registered as the LN continued to articulate ‘the people’ in nativist terms via reference to language diversity *and* via uses of language that perform that difference. Beyond the ‘South’ question, the LN’s wedging of people-elite does not translate into substantively coherent FP positions also in relation to the European Union (EU). Once again, in a period in time when the party never officially amended its approach to the definition of ‘the people’, the EU is presented as ‘coloniser’, ‘the number one enemy’, an ‘engine for growth’, and ‘not the number one enemy’—predicates that I elaborate in Sect. 5.5.

Rather than rallying around claims of ‘directionless’ of populist FP (see Hughes, 1975: 106), these examples present us with an empirical puzzle that highlights the need to go beyond and complicate assumptions regarding the influence that pre-conceived substantialist ideologies have on FP decision-making. That is, a shift away from understanding the FP of the LN as having a substantively fixed content—FP as outcome—and rather analyse it as a process—FP as constitutive—where the party (re)negotiates its identity. Starting from the observations that the party continues to articulate the authenticity of ‘the people’ in nativists terms—more specifically that the party establishes the Northern dialects as carriers of authenticity, and that ‘non-speaker Others’ are constructed as both threats and potential allies—in this chapter, I will attempt to overcome the barrier of expectation between domestic and foreign policy positions. In order to connect shifting articulations of people vs elite dynamics to the development of broader (international) social arrangements, this chapter develops a theoretical framework that foregrounds the performative-iterative dimension of parties’ self-understandings within social arrangements, and the articulation *in communication* of the ‘people vs elite’ antagonism. In this way, substantive fixity in antagonism is discarded, and change over time is investigated by tapping into the processual relational space that communication creates for the production of populist ideas through spoken words.

I develop this argument in five steps. In Sect. 5.2, I briefly introduce the working definition of populism that the present analysis employs. This allows me to foreground the importance of ‘acts of demarcation and differentiation’ in populist rhetoric, and how these acts produce and perform populist ideas. I then highlight how those acts form a composite part of an

iterative, performative identificatory practice that inherently intertwines subjects ('the people') and the surrounding society ('the elite', the Other), hence how they can be expected to intertwine with FP positions. After an overview of the LN's nativist rhetoric, in Sect. 5.3 I discuss the interrelation between communication and decision-making, which justifies the decision to empirically investigate the influence that communication has on FP by attending to decision-making processes. In Sect. 5.4, I present my methodology. The chapter then moves to the analytical section, and the resulting claim is that the Lega-Self is organically linked to group identity developed at home, whereas the party articulates the 'Other' according to an oppositional discursive logic that allows the 'Other' to remain constitutively empty and to receive substantive content only in specific policy field through particular policy decisions. On these terms, I conclude by arguing that the influence of populist communication is not a substantive ideology resulting from linear translation of self-other/people-elite antagonism, but forcing FP into a variable self-other oppositional *logic*.

ON POPULISM AND NARRATIVES

The LN has been defined by the specialised literature as a populist party (e.g. Ruzza & Fella, 2009). To define a political party as populist implies that the party employs a people-oriented and anti-elite discourse. More specifically, it suggests that the party makes recourse to a rhetoric that centrally features the separation and polarisation of society into two antagonistic sides—the pure people and the corrupt elite. Beyond this common denominator, and as highlighted also in the Introduction to this Volume, scholars have then disagreed on how to best describe populism (examples include Laclau, 2006; Roberts, 1995; Mudde, 2017; Ostiguy, 2009). Acknowledging the contested nature of the concept—and recalling that the goal of the present analysis is to investigate the influence of communication and language on the FP of the LN—in this chapter I follow an ideational approach as developed by Kirk A. Hawkins (2009). This is because the approach has been described as easily operationalizable, hence well suited for empirical analysis, but even more so because it clearly foregrounds the discursive construction of the divide between the two antagonistic sides, thereby making the framework well suited for investigating the specific puzzle presented by the LN.

In more explicit terms, the ideational approach foregrounds *ideas* as the main driving force behind other material features of populism (see

Hawkins, 2009), and it broadly understands ‘populism’ as a combination of ideological and rhetorical elements (Hawkins, 2009, esp. pp. 1044–46). It is defined as a rhetorical device for it separates society into two antagonistic groups—‘the people’ and ‘the elite’—to appeal to the ‘common’ people (see Hawkins et al., 2018; Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Mudde, 2017). Furthermore, it holds that populist parties employ a transgressive rhetorical style as a performative mode of political representation through which they define ‘the people’ as the ‘authentic’ element in society (see McDonnell & Ondelli, 2020) whose sovereignty is threatened by a dangerous Other (Löffmann, 2019). From there, populists vow to bring about a new political order that best represents the interests of ‘the people’ (Oliver & Rahn, 2016), thence centralising in decision-making the *volonté générale* [general will] (see Mudde, 2004: 543–545; Hawkins, 2009: 1045). It is in this respect—that is, in holding a set of fundamental beliefs on how the world works—that, according to the ideational approach, populism resembles an ideology without being as programmatic and conscious as more traditional ideologies (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 516). These definitional specifications have already been discussed in relation to the case of the LN, but what is important to acknowledge before proceeding to the FP dimension is that the LN has been classified specifically as a ‘nativist’ populist party ‘of the right’. This is meant to highlight that the sentiment of anti-elitism and the transgressive rhetorical style are accompanied by nativist beliefs where the party lends political significance to evocative narratives in order to exclude cultural, linguistic, and/or racial minorities (see Bonikowski, 2017). Furthermore, by constructing ‘the people’ as “naturally” authentic, the nativist approach adds to the central antagonism since ‘the elite’ becomes corrupt also *because* they are not authentic (Mudde, 2017, p. 29, emphasis added), and this thickens the ‘thin’ veneer of populism offered by the ideational approach.

In the case of the LN, an exploration of the nativist elements founds in the definition of ‘the people’ is warranted for it allows to better understand how communication creates a space for the iteration of populist ideas *through spoken words*; hence, in a second moment, the influence of communication on FP. Indeed, while the ideational approach has emphasised how particular ideas motivate action (FP as outcome), that scholarship has under-emphasised the understanding of ideas as embodied *in* language. In this respect, the narrative developed by the LN brings the history of the party back to around 1176, when the German army of

Frederick I Barbarossa, in an attempt to expand southward, attacked the independent municipalities in the northern Italian territories (Percivaldi, 2009). On that occasion, however, the German army retreated after clashing with the resistance posed by the numerically inferior troops of the then *Liga Lumbarda* (Lombard League) guided by Alberto da Giussano (Percivaldi, 2009). According to the narrative employed by the now-LN, the *Liga* is the historical predecessor of one of the six movements that in 1991 founded the LN, and the victory against the German army is portrayed as exemplifying the nature of the people of the North *hence* their innate desire for independence (Percivaldi, 2009). Recalling what has been hinted in the introduction, the LN presently contends that such “biological nature” of the people has been passed on from one generation to another, and the party supports this contention by emphasising the continued use of dialects among its members (Lega Nord, 2014a, p. 7). Indeed, from the explicitly articulated beliefs that “identity is established in language” (Salvini, 2014), and that “the biological nature of man (sic) is transmitted through words” (Lega Nord, 2014a, p. 7), the local dialects that are presently spoken in the Northern region are constructed by the LN as a “language of affects that crosses generations and draws together grandparents and grandchildren” [...] *so that* the authenticity of the people remains “expressed in their [dialects] use” (Lega Nord, 2014a, p. 7). As such, it surfaces that dialects are mobilised as a marker of belonging to an allegedly biological category, and the nativist approach is consolidated in dialects’ *uses* since their actual use *performs* authenticity rather than merely advancing claims to it. What can be argued, then, is that the LN gives an appearance of naturalness to the authenticity of the people by making language *use* an act of identification in itself. This effectively transposes the past into the present, thereby providing an appearance of historical continuity to the party. As I elaborate in the coming Sections, history is naturalised, historicity is extinguished, and the ‘present-past’ allows the party to naturalise the course of future action (future-past), from where it is possible to shed light on the influence that communication has on FP preferences.

COMMUNICATION AND THE INFLUENCE ON FOREIGN POLICY

Beyond the case of the LN, what the above discussion highlights is that communication plays a crucial role in populist rhetoric for it deepens the wedge in society by performatively contributing to the construction and

stabilisation of identity by the group.² On this ground, my contention is that communication’s work can be analytically understood as that of a sense-making device that—through spoken words—*performs* an act of demarcation and differentiation that intertwines targets (the ‘people’) and the surrounding society (the ‘elite’ as the Other). More specifically, and in accordance with the assumptions of this Volume (see Introduction), my suggestion is to understand communication as actively contributing to the party’s production of identity. However, ‘identity’ is now understood as part of an irreducibly relational process that intertwines actors and society, and that is stabilised through ‘acts of demarcation and differentiation’. Consequently, the very notion of ‘identity’ is analytically replaced by the far-richer concept of “bundle of identification” (Bucher & Jasper, 2016: 393–396, 406), and the added value is that the study can now be empirically directed at observable articulations—so-called acts of identification (Bucher & Jasper, 2016)—that refer to identity without partaking in its essentialisation.³ Consequently, a populist party within social formations (International politics) becomes visible not as an original and unitary presence that pre-exists the analysis, but as a “complex bundle of coordinate processes” (Rescher, 2000: 9). That is, as an intersection of constitutive interdependencies (Elias, 1978) that is stabilised (also) in Foreign policy decision-making. On these terms, not only does communication become a cardinal point for studying FP, but the analysis is shifted from a focus on a self–other dichotomy (in the singular) towards studying *identifications in figurations*, or, more precisely, in foreign relations (in the plural). This moves away from understanding FP as outcome towards an understanding of FP as process, and it directly complicates the expectation of a linear translation from domestic to international.

² For a more detailed analysis of populist performance of identity, see Aiolfi (Chap. 11, this volume). Importantly, the discussion developed here differs from and adds to Aiolfi’s approach by investigating language *uses* as a particular aspect of performativity, a dimension largely overlooked in extant literature.

³ The specialized literature has proceeded on the assumption that populist FP preferences are derivative of preferences on domestic policy issues (e.g. Verbeek & Zaslove, 2015); that is, that they are extrapolated from the interaction between populism’s “thin ideology” and the thicker ideological position to which a movement is attached (Chrysogelos, 2017). However, by positioning the ideological bedfellow as independent variable for the study of a parties’ behaviour in the international arena, the analyses have shored up a substantialist way of thinking that ultimately fails to delve into processes of emergence that justify and sustain the wedding between the “thin veneer” and the thicker ideology.

Furthermore, the understanding of language used as a means for the production of “the people” must be read alongside the assumption that populists vow to bring a political order that best represents the demands of the “authentic people”. What this means is that communication creates a space from where to represent the will of the authentic majority, so that an interrogation of populist dynamics (which extends to FP as herein defined) should involve the study of this communicative dimension. However, and to reiterate, by focusing on relations over time, the aim of this approach is not to add yet another layer to the study of foreign policy by privileging the domestic. Rather, the aim is to investigate how bundles of identifications are temporarily (and always incompletely) tied together and privileged *in* foreign policy decision-making processes, thereby foregrounding communication’s intrinsic relation *with* foreign policy. Critically, and to conclude, to focus on identification practices centralises the temporal fixing of meanings and the practices of boundary-drawing, and this has the distinct advantage that the study can retain a focus on empirically observable actions as these “acts” characterise political (hence also foreign policy) decision-making processes (Bucher & Jasper, 2016).

Importantly, the fruitfulness of foregrounding the element of communication is supported by insights from an emerging literature within the International Relations (IR) discipline. Similarly discarding conceptualisations of actors’ identities in causal and individualistic terms, and rather focusing on the production of identity in terms of its narrative construction, scholars have already argued in favour of focusing on the co-constitutive relationship between actors’ acts of identification and the “social contexts” in which these acts emerge (see Allan et al., 2018; Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009). Of relevance is the claim therein advanced that actors must not be studied apart from social contexts, but rather they must be conceptualized as “bundles of coordinated processes” (Rescher, 2000: 9) that emerge through discursive practices and that exhibit various degrees of stability across time (Bucher & Jasper, 2016). These claims hint at the relevance of foregrounding communication since the approach allows to emphasise how the ‘people vs elite’ dynamic itself is part of an irreducibly relational process. This is a fundamental observation for investigating the *continued* influence that communication has on FP preferences. It points to the fact that the above acts are iteratively articulated in relation to “Others”, so that it is not sufficient to highlight how an ‘Other’ occupies centre stage in FP in a point in time. Rather, it must be investigated how ‘Others’ are *moved* to the foreground; on which terms is the

relation between the Self, Other and the external world articulated in the ‘acts’; and the relation between past, present, future Self and the external world (Bucher & Jasper, 2016: 398). This is what will allow me to uncover FP preferences as they emerge and evolve in communication. Lastly, by placing populist parties’ self-understandings within social formations—International politics –, the policy-positions that the LN takes become visible not as an original presence, but they become necessarily visible as an intersection of constitutive interdependencies (Linklater, 2011) and they are consequently studied for how they are stabilised (iteratively) in decision-making. In its togetherness, therefore, this approach allows me to steer away from holding pre-formed expectations regarding linearity of translation between ideology and FP.

Before turning to the empirics, it must be mentioned that the above framework has been developed for the study of FP behaviour specifically in international arenas, so that the LN’s relation to the ‘South’ would exceed the intended analytical scope. In relation to the domestic/international divide and the exclusive focus on what occurs at the international level, I contend that the strict division domestic/international is placed in the background once we elaborate on the assumptions that inform the overall approach. In this regard, a “social context” of interest has been defined as a “stability pattern of variable processes” wherein the development of an actor is tied to that of its social arrangement (Rescher, 2000: 13). On these terms, the divide is a second-order difference introduced by the researcher’s own question of ‘*who acts?*’, or better, whose ‘acts of demarcation and differentiation’ attempt to draw political boundaries in the external world. Therefore, the State and formal institutions are no longer the sole actor engaging in FP, as FP becomes more broadly defined as a forum in which leaders of identity-based movement iteratively attempt to stabilise their proposal (Balci, 2017). The analysis can therefore proceed with the case of the LN.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to explore the case of the LN through this framework, I employ a methodology that is inspired by the ethos of Grounded Theory (GT) approaches. That is, a methodology characterised by an abductive, iterative-dynamic research process that requires constant interplay between data collection, analysis, and concept formation (Glaser & Strauss, 1999;

Wilson, 2012).⁴ This effectively favours a processual perspective over a linear-consecutive interpretation of the data, which allows me to produce intertextual (hence cross-time) links that are important for highlighting the temporal shifts in FP positions, and for tracing these changes to the communicative production of ideas. In strict methodological terms, the approach involves a twofold research procedure. Firstly, to abductively gathered references to the production of FP preferences by the LN, I investigate the selected material by asking a number of questions that allow me to know acts of demarcation and differentiation when I see one. This refers to the boundary-drawing exercises through which the LN establishes the authenticity of the people, and consequently the action proposed to protect the ‘general will’ therein defined. The second procedure refers to the exposition of intertextual linkages and cross-references within the overall body of material. Here, the goal is to highlight the temporal-processual dimension of change in the backdrop of a high degree of institutional sameness, which allows me to control for the influence of external factors—hence to better understand the influence that communication has on the FP of the party. Regarding the body of material, I turn to acts of demarcations that have been carried out in decision-making as encapsulated in electoral programmes issued since 2012, in public statements that have been released at party conferences and the yearly ‘Pontida’ event, and lastly when the party was member of the coalition government after the 2018 general elections. This gives me a strategic five-year time-frame around the central year of 2017, the time when the LN opened to the South and pursued national aspirations.⁵

THE CASE OF THE LN

The discussion on the populist rhetoric of the LN has highlighted that the traditional wedge between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ has been deepened by a nativist approach that gives an appearance of naturalness to the authenticity of the ‘alpine communities’. This is specifically accomplished through the establishment of what I have defined ‘present-past’; that is,

⁴ For a similar approach, see Bucher and Jasper (2016), and Allan et al. (2018). For a discussion of FP as a field for identity-based movements, see Balci (2017).

⁵ Destradi et al. (Chap. 15, this volume) expand on the literature on the LN by studying the rhetoric of the party in diplomatic relations after the 2018 elections. Albeit proceeding from different theoretical assumptions, an interested reader might find the study relevant for the empirical material it presents.

the narrative connection between the 1176 battle of Legnano (fought by the historical alliance who defended the autonomy of the Northern territories) and the foundation of the LN in 1991. As argued, the pragmatic situation allowing for this nexus is one informed by the belief that the “biological nature of man (sic) is transmitted through words” (Lega Nord, 2014a, p. 7), so that the continued use of dialects—a “language of affect”—testifies to the continued authenticity of ‘the people’ (Lega Nord, 2014a, p. 7). I have hinted at how this recollection also naturalises the course of future action. In this section, and turning to the process of decision-making, I focus on the relation between the LN-Self and alterity in order to investigate how communication intertwines with and influences FP positions. The resulting claim is that the LN articulates the ‘Other’ according to an oppositional discursive logic that allows the ‘Other’ to remain constitutively empty and to receive substantive content only in specific policy fields through particular policy decisions.

Relation to Alterity and Exteriority in Foreign Policy

Within the body of data that has been gathered in relation to the ‘South question’, a recurrent element regarding the relation that the LN has with the ‘South’ is that its Otherness is constructed *ex negativo*. That is, the Southern regions are referred to as those territories whose mayors “do not speak our [LN’s] language”, “do not share our same accents” (Salvini, 2014), and “do not have our Milanese accent, or the one from Veneto, Friuli, or Ligure” (Salvini, 2016). Similar references to language are scattered throughout the documents analysed; most relevant, though, is that they are maintained even in the latter part of the timeframe when labels of ‘spendthrift’ and ‘lazy’ have gradually been replaced by narratives of the South as being itself tired of the “colonialism” exercised by the elite in Rome (Fontana, 2019a). On this basis, a central observation is that the nativist approach to the definition of ‘the people’—centred around matters of language—implies in itself a process of Othering. More specifically, it leads to the formation of what I define here as a ‘monolithic Other’ that is identified—*ex negativo*—through *qualitative* characteristics. An implication is that its substantive content is maintained unaltered throughout the period of interest. Indeed, even when the LN effectively opened towards the South in 2017, the semantics employed indicate that ‘the South’ continued to belong to an outgroup, not least because their accent continued to be singled-out as symbol of difference, and the shift in

rhetoric is rather registered in the contention that those ‘tired populations’ must be rescued from the “*malgoverno*” in Rome (Fontana, 2019a). Hence, the sought-for openness towards ‘the South’, rather than a betrayal of ‘the people’ points to a broader dynamic.

Understood as acts towards the actor’s external world, hence specifically in terms of FP, the relevance of the above observations has to do with the fact that the acts of demarcation and differentiation envisioning a relation to the external world did connect the LN to exteriority. However, they never semantically linked alterity (in this case, the ‘South’ as Other) to notions of hostility. In other words, the South-as-Other was never constructed as an ‘alter’ that threatens ‘the people’—or their sovereignty—*because* it is not authentic, as nativist approaches suggest (see Mudde, 2017). Rather, the hostility was an outgrowth of the measures adopted by a second ‘alter’: the elite in Rome. As I illustrate, the alterity of the latter has been elaborated not on monolithic terms, but via parallels with a mythical past that establish a cross-historical relation of similarity between the government in Rome and Frederick I Barbarossa. More specifically, the LN constructs ‘the elite’ in Rome as a “Barbarossa” that threatens the natural authenticity of ‘the people’, and that *therefore* must be opposed. I define this entity as ‘historical Other’, an empty signifier that is given different substantive content depending on the policy arena at stake. Further testifying to its malleability is that the Barbarossa-Other is also found in FP decisions adopted in relation to another actor, the EU, thence strengthening the claim that FP positions are forced into a variable logic that is re-articulated and re-contextualised in a variety of situations starting from group identity developed at home.

Returning to ‘the elite’ in Rome who “robs us [*Padani*] year after year” and stands in the way of the exercise of the sovereignty by the people and for the people’s needs (Tosi, 2013), I will now turn to the contentions that LN’s members use to justify specific actions in order to study the role that the revival of the past has in legitimising present action. Pragmatically, the revival of the mythical past of the party establishes a degree of similarity between present and past contexts of operation; “We have a history, our history is that the Liga [*Liga Lumbarda*] was born to pursue freedom, to set free the North, and today we continue the fight” (Calderoli, 2016). Building on this pragmatic background, the LN then justifies its relation to exteriority by defining a functional similarity between the actor who historically threatened the (natural) authenticity of ‘the people’—that is, Barbarossa—and the actor who is presently threatening the (equally

natural) authenticity of ‘the people’. In the particular case of the above utterance, the elite in Rome. Through this mechanism, the LN naturalises the future course of action since “we [the people] are the grandchildren of those who fought against the army of Barbarossa one-thousand year ago, so today, just like before, we are ready to fight” (Bossi, 2016). Similarly, after claiming that “the people from Padania took an oath against *Roma ladrona*”, the contention is that, “the Lega was born to set free an enslaved country; we are now called to fight, and we will fight as we have already fought in the past” (Bossi, 2017). It is instructive therefore to highlight that in proposing action against particular policies—which in this case referred to the national redistribution of tax-payer money—the critiques are seldom directed at any specificity of the system criticised. Rather, the emphasis is strongly on the fact that ‘the people’ are made “slave” by a government who *therefore* is corrupt.

As can be seen, the South itself is never the ‘protagonist’ of the FP discussions of the LN. Rather, its alterity is brought centre stage whenever it is privileged by the Barbarossa-esque elite. Importantly, what is maintained of this ‘historical Other’ is solely its mode of existence vis-à-vis the LN-Self, hence its hostility towards the (natural) condition of autonomy which defines the natural authenticity of ‘the people’. It is on this basis that my claim here is that the Barbarossa-Other works as an empty signifier that is given materiality whenever a functional similarity to the mythical past is established, and the collapse it performs serve to ‘naturalise’ future action—to force action into an oppositional logic. That the Self remains organically linked to group identity developed at home is visible in the justification that members of the LN provide for Matteo Salvini’s mandate in the aftermath of the 2018 general elections, when the LN’s leader has been equated to the leader of the *Liga Lombarda*: “Alberto from Giussano left Pontida and fought for the independence of the *Lombardia* against Barbarossa; today Matteo [Salvini] from *Milan* will leave Pontida [the 2019 edition] and fight for our autonomy against the Barbarossas [originally in the plural] of the government” (Calderoli, 2019). Once again, the emptiness of the ‘historical Other’ gives it malleability, to be re-contextualised and re-articulated in a variety of situations, depending on the policy area, and FP positions are then forced into this variable. Further examples are the “Barbarossa del governo” (Zaia, 2018) who denies the validity of the referendum for independence that ‘the people’ have won, “there are 1.5mln people ready to fight, today like before. Yesterday it was against Barbarossa, today it is against a colonial state” (Zaia, 2018). The

same Barbarossa then “colonises” the Northern regions by prohibiting the use of dialects in public spaces such as schools, a decree that is seen as a clear attempt to cancel the culture distinctive of the people: “colonialism always starts from the language, and it is from there that they [Barbarossa-Other] are now seeking to cancel our culture” (Bossi, 2014). As I discuss next, it also refers to the Barbarossa in Brussel who forces the Italian government into disadvantageous agreements that would allegedly undermine the country’s cultural richness by standardising it, and that *therefore* must be voted against.

The European Union as Other

Let me briefly summarise the argument developed thus far. The Otherness of the Barbarossa-Other is not linked to qualitative characteristics of an ‘alter’, but it rather plays on the *functional similarity* of a relation of hostility towards ‘the people’. That is, the LN does not define an ‘as such’ of the hostility of the Barbarossa-government, but it articulates it in view of how the elite, as ‘alter’, impacts the general will of the people—which remains organically linked to group identity developed at home. Because hostility is not essentialized in the monolithic-Other, the relation towards it is not defined a priori, which explains why it is not necessarily linear across policy areas and throughout time. It is therefore at the imbrication of the two key rhetorical elements—that is, uses of language to perform authenticity and references to language to establish cross-historicity—that communication delineates and sustains an oppositional logic onto which to force FP positions that stabilise bundles of identification. Moving beyond the South question to showcase that the logic extends to FP broadly defined, I now move to the LN’s rhetoric towards the EU as this policy-arena provides a good example of how the oppositional logic works.

Also in this second case, the members of the LN justify the party’s FP positions by playing on a functional similarity established between the actors involved. The mechanism is straightforward in the opening lines of the party’s programme for the 2014 EU election. There, the party contends that “Europe (sic) represents the new Holy Roman Empire, centred in Brussel, with the ‘European Court of Human Rights’ representing the new papacy, centred in Strasburg” (Lega Nord, 2014b, p. 22). Specific opponents are then categorised as “parties of the past” and on this basis it becomes imperative to not “vote German” (Salvini, 2014). Furthermore, the historical-Other receives substance as militants are exhorted to recall

the “reckless members who challenged Barbarossa, defeating him and changing the course of history” because “today [2019 elections] as well our desire must be to change the course of history, and do not accept what others impose on us” (Giorgetti, 2018). It is clear therefore how FP preferences are influenced by a relation of *functional similarity* established by acts of demarcation and differentiation that imply both ‘the people’ and exteriority. This is furthermore visible in the syntax of the contentions; “as you all know, we, the people from the Lega, we were not born to be slaves, *therefore* we will vote against Merkel, against Macron” (Fontana, 2019b, emphasis added). However, precisely because such a mechanism does not imply an ‘as such’ of the hostility of the Barbarossa-Other, the relation towards that entity is not necessarily coherent across time.⁶ Exemplifying this is the economic measures implemented by the EU are problematic only when they negatively affect ‘the people’; when they do not, the EU wears the hat of “a driving force for development” (Lega Nord, 2018a), “an opportunity” that offers a “competitiveness that allows for a proper development of Italian firms, which can become the engine for growth of the country, and a pivotal point in the economy of the EU as a whole” (Lega Nord, 2018b). For these opportunities, it seems, the EU loses the hat of a Barbarossa-esque enemy. However, as soon as the hostility is perceived against the people, the EU re-turns into “the number one enemy” (Calderoli, 2016) to be fought.

CONCLUSION

This chapter started by observing that the LN has adopted a nativist approach to the definition of ‘the people’, and that it posited the uses of local dialects as a marker of belonging to an allegedly biological category. In this mechanism, *uses* of dialects played a central role in establishing the appearance of historical continuity in the party’s existence. At the same time, in 2017, the party pursued national government aspiration, thence opening towards the South-as-Other. However, it did so while maintaining consistency with the nativist approach. Notwithstanding these observations, the specialised literature lacks a coherent picture on the influence that communication has for the production of populist ideas, and how these are reinforced in FP preferences. This gap is surprising considering

⁶Importantly, this is different from claiming the ‘directionlessness’ of the FP of populist parties.

the acknowledged importance of language within the rhetoric of the party. As I argued through a review of the extant literature, existing theories are ill-suited for addressing this dimension for they proceed on a number of assumptions that give to the party a self-evident character, thereby blinding studies to an investigation of the processes which justify and sustain the wedding between thin veneer and thick ideology. I have then argued in favour of understanding communication as ‘acts of demarcation and differentiation’ that drive a wedge in society at the same time as it intertwines ‘the people’ and exteriority. This allowed me to analytically study FP as process rather than outcome, and empirically direct the investigation at the emergence and evolution of FP positions in a way that foregrounds the *continued* influence of communication. When applied to the LN case, what surfaced is that the party, in mobilising ‘acts of demarcation and differentiation’ establishes a present-past that self-legitimises the course of future action. It does so by drawing a constitutively open ‘historical Other’ that only receives substantive content in specific policy fields. This is supported by the functional similarity that LN establishes between present ‘Others’ and Frederick I Barbarossa, the historical actor against whom the mythical precursor of the LN has fought. On this evidence, the resulting claim is that while the Self is organically linked with conceptions of group identity that are developed at home, the articulations of the ‘Other’ are informed by the particular policy field at hand, and the overall structure is then actualised in the policy arena through specific policy decisions. As such, the influence of populist discourse on FP amounts to the forcing of FP into a variable Self-Other *logic*.

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Latin American Populist Leaders and the International Stage: Analysing Their Belief Systems

Consuelo Thiers and Leslie E. Wehner

INTRODUCTION

Populist leaders have mastered different communication styles to attract people to their political projects and undermine the power and political position of the elite. Populists resort to different communication strategies aimed at seducing and securing a bond with the people to cement their electoral success (Lacatus et al., Chap. 1, this volume). After all, populists are in a constant electoral trial (Müller, 2016) and need to

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reinforce their messages to the masses. Populists, when addressing the people, seek to strengthen their promise of being the saviours and fixers of the country (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017; Weyland, 2003) and that they will enact the role of leaders to promote the general will of the people and protect them from the evil forces of the elite (Moffitt, 2016). When populists bring this Manichean communication style of “us vs them” to the international, they also seem to bring their reluctant and less cooperative approach to these multilateral settings, as these institutions are depicted in the populist rhetoric as a location of a global and internationalised elite (Chryssogelos, 2020). The existing literature on populism in IR with different degrees tends to show how these leaders become threats to the stability of the multilateral order by adopting a rather reluctant and what seems to be a non-cooperative approach (at least rhetorically) regarding the international (De Sá Guimarães & De Oliveira E Silva, 2021; Jenne, 2021; Lake et al., 2021; Löfflmann, 2021; Nye, 2017). Latin American populists seem to have followed a similar path of undermining multilateral institutions’ value and institutional legitimacy. Leaders from the third wave of populism, such as Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales, have criticised multilateral institutions as expressions of the US influence and power and the United Nations (UN) has become the main target of this criticism.

Yet, populist leaders still attend and deliver their speeches at the UN. Chávez’s incendiary rhetoric towards the US and George Bush in the General Assembly of the UN in 2006 is a good example of this pattern. Similarly, Jair Bolsonaro has also been critical of the UN as a location of an internationalised elite (Casarões & Farias, 2021; De Sá Guimarães & De Oliveira E Silva, 2021; Thiers & Wehner, 2022; Wehner & Thies, 2021). Thus, this chapter deals with the following questions: Are there patterns in Latin American populist leaders’ beliefs that can help explain their apparent conflictual approach and reluctance towards multilateral institutions? Does their belief system differ from other Latin American leaders? Are there differences across the right- and left-wing ideological divide of populists?

We contend that populist leaders’ beliefs about power relations in the international system can help make sense of their conflictual approach and reluctance towards multilateral fora. We conceptualise reluctance and conflictual approach as a set of behaviours and rhetorical utterances displayed by the leader informed by a Manichean view of the world, which goes from hesitancy to engage with the international to the use of hostile verbal language and threats and the use of punitive measures (Thiers & Wehner,

2022). While populists may resort to these aspects in their communication styles when part of the world of multilateralism, these features are not always constant in terms of magnitude, frequency, and salience.

While the communication style of populist leaders may be influenced by strategic logic or ideology, it can also reflect their beliefs about power relations in the international system. In this chapter, we argue that how leaders perceive the international—whether they view it as hostile, friendly, or benign—shapes their interactions with multilateral institutions. To examine this, we focus on the belief systems of four Latin American populist leaders: Hugo Chávez (Venezuela, 1999–2013), Evo Morales (Bolivia, 2006–2019), Nayib Bukele (El Salvador, 2019–present), and Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil, 2019–2022). Specifically, we focus on these leaders' diplomatic communication styles within the prime multilateral institution—the UN. While these leaders perform in this setting, the audiences of their discourses are both diplomatic and domestic. Moreover, these leaders represent the diversity of populisms across the right-left spectrum in Latin America and allow us to analyse similarities and differences in their perspectives on power relations in the international system.

To answer our research questions, we rely on the benefits of the Operational Code Analysis (OCA) approach to determine these leaders' belief systems and how they shape the way they perceive power relations and confront the world. To conduct this assessment, we employ their public utterances within the UN. The OCA allows for analysing leaders' philosophical and instrumental beliefs to determine how they see and make sense of the world and its power relations and how these beliefs shape particular motivational dispositions or actions (Walker et al., 2003). The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, we position our study on populism within social psychological approaches to Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and within the framework of studies on populist foreign policy. Second, we introduce our theoretical and methodological frameworks on belief systems. Third, we present the results of the OCA assessment and provide the belief system scores for each case study. Fourth, we compare and analyse the different belief systems of each populist leader in relation to their foreign policy. Finally, we conclude by discussing the analytical value of our theoretical and methodological approach.

THE MICRO-FOUNDATIONS OF POPULIST LEADERS' BEHAVIOUR IN FOREIGN POLICY

Populist leaders employ an antagonistic communication style that pits the elite against the people, often mobilising neglected or forgotten segments of the population to build electoral support (Weyland, 2001). By giving voice to the people, populists position themselves as the saviours of those who have been left behind by the elite (Lacatus et al., Chap. 1, this volume). This framework of the people versus the elite has become central to studies of how populism manifests itself in foreign policy. While the specifics of populist foreign policy vary depending on the accompanying ideology, the defence of the people and the challenge to elite power are common themes (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019; Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017; Wehner & Thies, 2021). This people vs elite at the international level is neither static nor uniform. Populists create and refer to images of the people vs the elite, following the logic of friend and enemy which are brought to the international by the leader (Wehner, 2022).

Recent research has provided a more nuanced perspective of how populist leaders bring and use this dichotomy of people vs elite in the international. Destradi et al. (2022) develop a framework to study the politicisation of populism in foreign policy and show that the politicisation of populism is a matter of degree. In the international populist discourse, the rhetorical focus given by the leader to either an anti-elite or people dimension explains whether the state is presented to a global audience as an “underdog” or whether the leader prioritises a discourse based on “the strength of the nation”. Previously, others have shown that some populist leaders adopt a rhetoric of anti-globalism (De Sá Guimarães & De Oliveira E Silva, 2021) and revisionism (Jenne, 2021). Friedrichs (2022) concludes that populist leaders are oppositional nationalists vis-à-vis non-populist leaders of the same country who act as sportsmanlike nationalists (except for Modi, who fits the latter category). This differentiation suggests that populist leaders tend to adopt a less cooperative stance towards multilateralism. Across all these studies, the underlying assumption is that populists view the world through the lens of people vs elite. When populist leaders bring this antagonistic dynamic from the domestic political life to the international realm, they often question the legitimacy of multilateral institutions that are perceived as protecting the interests of the elite.

Additionally, the existing literature on populism in IR/FPA has emphasised the tendency of populist leaders to challenge and undermine the

liberal international order (Lake et al., 2021). This order encompasses a variety of institutions and practices of global governance. However, there is some disagreement among scholars regarding populist leaders' attitudes and behaviour towards multilateralism (Copelovitch & Pevehouse, 2019; Destradi & Plagemann, 2019; Lake et al., 2021; Thiers & Wehner, 2022; Wajner & Roniger, 2019).

The existing research suggests that anti-pluralist populist leaders often adopt an anti-globalist and nationalistic stance when dealing with the international. This often involves questioning the benefits of multilateralism, which is perceived as serving the interests of the elite. As a result, their relationship with multilateral institutions is often conflictive and challenging, even when they engage with them. The erratic behaviour of some populist leaders, such as Trump or Bolsonaro, and their rapid shifts in positions on issues, institutions, and other leaders can make cooperation and mutual understanding challenging to achieve in the international arena (Drezner, 2020).

A less explored aspect in the literature on populist leaders is the role of their personal characteristics in shaping their countries' foreign policy. In other words, there is little work aimed at elucidating the reasons that explain these leaders' behaviours internationally. This neglect is puzzling as populist leaders tend to enjoy more latitude to bring their own predispositions to the international (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019). While some research has explored the psychology of populist leaders, the connection between their psychology and foreign policy behaviour remains underdeveloped (e.g. Drezner, 2020; Fortunato et al., 2018; Nai & Martínez i Coma, 2019; Weyland, 2003). A few studies focus on understanding the micro-foundations of populist leaders' foreign policy behaviours. For instance, Thiers and Wehner (2022) employ a leadership trait analysis approach to explore the impact of the personalities of leaders such as Donald Trump and Hugo Chávez on shaping their foreign policies. Their study suggests that particular patterns in these leaders' personalities significantly influence their less cooperative and conflict-driven behaviour. The research finds that the primary predictors of Trump's and Chávez's behaviour in the international arena are their low focus on the task and high focus on relationships. In a similar line of research but focusing on populist leaders' beliefs, Özdamar and Ceydilek (2020) analyse the philosophical and instrumental beliefs of some European populist radical right leaders employing the operational code analysis approach. They find that these leaders lack a common pattern in their belief systems about foreign

policy. They also suggest that while these leaders are more conflictual in their worldviews, their instrumental approach to the world is similar to the average group of world leaders. We aim to extend this type of analysis to the Latin American region, studying populist leaders across the ideological spectrum. In the following section, we highlight the advantages of employing the OCA approach.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF OPERATIONAL CODE ANALYSIS

Understanding the belief system of populist leaders is particularly relevant in the Latin American region because they normally have a greater scope for manoeuvre from institutional and political constraints in the foreign policy arena (Malamud, 2015). Our assumption is that populist leaders' worldviews and perceptions will have steering effects on their foreign policy decisions. Thus, we take a cognitive approach that does not assume the presence of entirely rational decision-makers. Cognitive approaches are concerned with variables that have the power to impact cognitive processes that underlie decision-making, such as information load, ambiguity, and stress (Levi & Tetlock, 1980). The key points in studying international politics are power and interests, and both concepts are cognitive in nature (Young & Schafer, 1998). Individuals' beliefs and reasoning processes matter because they underlie political behaviour and establish the basis upon which power and interests are understood (Young & Schafer, 1998). In line with this observation, this study employs the OCA approach. The OCA is an analytical tool proposed by Leites (1951) to evaluate the worldview of leaders regarding international politics. George (1969) later developed this framework by identifying ten questions about politics that aim to assess two groups of beliefs. The first group consists of philosophical beliefs about the fundamental nature of politics, while the second group, instrumental beliefs, relates to the ends-means relationships in the context of political action (e.g. is the political universe essentially one of harmony or conflict? What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?). George (1969) argues that the responses of political actors to these questions could define their fundamental orientations towards leadership and action problems. In summary, the operational code approach to studying beliefs asks what individuals know, feel, and want concerning the exercise of power (Schafer & Walker, 2006b).

Content analysis tools can be used to assess this information based on leaders' public statements. In 1998, Walker et al. developed a system for scoring and analysing operational codes, creating indicators for the philosophical and instrumental propensities proposed by George. This system identifies positive and negative attributions for the beliefs expressed by a leader in the context of self-other relationships. The self-other valences are then characterised as propensities to diagnose and employ cooperative or conflictive behaviours that represent the exercise of power. These procedures enable the construction of indices for each question in George's inventory of philosophical and instrumental operational code beliefs. The OCA indices use data generated by the Verbs in Context System (VICS), a content analysis technique aimed at collecting and identifying the attributions made by leaders in their speeches, interviews, or public statements. Additionally, Walker et al. (1998) suggest three dimensions for the operational code analysis, emphasising power relationships between Self and Others (see Table 6.1). Research conducted employing the OCA approach has attempted to bridge the gap between agent-oriented and structure-oriented explanations of foreign policy and world politics (Schafer & Walker, 2006c). For instance, OCA has been employed to assess the role of leaders' beliefs in shaping interstate conflicts and explain cooperative and non-cooperative behaviours amongst leaders (Lazarevska et al., 2006; Malici, 2011; Schafer & Walker, 2006a; Thiers, 2021). The OCA approach provides tools to assess leaders' behaviour in light of their beliefs and allows for a comparison of beliefs across time and subjects.

METHOD

We focus on the above-mentioned Latin American populist leaders and what they say in the UN as the most important multilateral forum. Both Morales and Chávez share a left-leaning ideology while Bolsonaro and Bukele share a right-leaning outlook. Due to the disparities in these leaders' time in power, the number of speeches, words, and verbs analysed differs substantially (see Table 6.2). However, considering that we aggregated all the data contained in these leaders' speeches to obtain their final scores, the total number of verbs analysed for each profile surpasses the minimum of 150–200 to consider them valid (Schafer & Walker, 2006b). To carry out the analysis, we employed the Profiler Plus 7.3.19 software and the Spanish version of OCA developed by Thiers (Brunner et al., 2020).

Table 6.1 Key dimensions in operational code analysis

Diagnostic propensities	(P-1) <i>nature of politics</i> : leaders' net attribution of positive/cooperative versus negative/conflictual valences to others (P-2) <i>prospects for achieving one's fundamental political values</i> : leaders' beliefs that the conflict is either temporary or permanent (P-3) deals with the <i>predictability of the political future</i> (uncertainty-certainty) (P-4) refers to the balance between the leader's self-attribution and other-attributions and deals with the question of <i>the extent to which the leader can control historical developments and political outcomes</i> (P-5) deals with the <i>role of chance</i> in forecasting the future and predicting political results
Choice propensities	(I-1) leader's net attribution of cooperative and conflictual valences to the self. It deals with the leader's <i>strategic approach to political goals</i> (I-2) refers to the intensity in pursuing a conflictual or cooperative strategy. It deals with the question of <i>how goals and objectives can be pursued most effectively</i> (I-5) refers to the allocation of self-attributions into different classifications of cooperative and conflictual acts. It deals with the question of <i>the utility and role of different means</i> in the exercise of power. It refers to the choice of a control relationship between self and other in which self intends to seek or maintain control of the relationship by using words and deeds as positive or negative sanctions
Shift propensities	(I-3) deals with the question concerning the leader's <i>approach to calculation, control, and acceptance of the risks of political action</i> . It is based upon the concepts of risk acceptance and risk aversion towards different political outcomes (I-4) deals with the question regarding <i>the matter of timing and action</i> . It assumes that the more relevant the timing of action in assessing the risk of political acts, the greater the propensity to shift between conflict and cooperation. If the leader's shift propensity between conflict and cooperation is low, then the strategic approach to goals is more likely to be the prevailing strategy (I-4a). The propensity to shift between words and deeds denotes another feature of timing; a higher shift propensity, in this case, suggests a more risk-averse orientation towards the undesirable outcomes of submission or deadlock (I-4b)

Source: Walker et al. (1998)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To determine potential patterns in these leaders' beliefs system and their similarities and differences with other Latin American leaders, we compared their scores with a norming group of fifteen Latin American leaders

Table 6.2 Number of speeches, words, and verbs per populist leader

<i>President</i>	<i>Number of speeches</i>	<i>Number of words</i>	<i>Number of coded verbs</i>
Jair Bolsonaro	3	7113	229
Nayib Bukele	4	7827	247
Hugo Chávez	8	21,211	673
Evo Morales	22	49,360	1744

(Brummer et al., 2020). Table 6.3 shows these leaders’ individual operational code scores and their Z-scores compared to the means of the norming group. We labelled their scores as high, low, and moderate based on the standard deviation from the mean scores. If scores exceed one standard deviation above the mean for the sample of the norming group, the leader is considered high on that belief. Conversely, if the score is one standard deviation below the norming group, the leader is considered low on that belief. The “lean high” or “lean low” categories were utilised when the scores exceeded 0.5 standard deviations below or above the mean. The results show that these leaders’ beliefs tend to differ substantially from other Latin American leaders, as over sixty per cent of their scores are above or below the average. The presence of extreme scores in populist leaders has also been observed in previous research showing that populist leaders’ personality profiles tend to differ considerably from the average world leader. This feature can help explain populist leaders’ tendency to behave as rogue actors who undermine cooperation (Thiers & Wehner, 2022). Moreover, this result lends weight to research that has associated the “extreme” manifestation of leaders’ individual traits with their tendency to engage in low-quality decision-making and foreign policy fiascos (Brummer, 2016).

Philosophical Beliefs

Regarding their philosophical beliefs about international organisations, Chávez and Morales hold a more pessimistic view of the political universe and their ability to achieve political goals compared to the average Latin American leader, while Bukele sees the political universe as friendlier and has a more optimistic outlook on his prospects for achieving political objectives. Bolsonaro’s beliefs about the nature of politics and his ability to attain goals are similar to those of other regional leaders. Concerning

Table 6.3 OCA results—populist leaders’ beliefs

OpCode	Latin American Leaders’ Means and SDs (N=15)	Bolsonaro			Bukele			Chávez			Morales		
		OpCode	Z-score	Category	OpCode	Z-score	Category	OpCode	Z-score	Category	OpCode	Z-score	Category
P-1	0.46 (0.122)	0.49	0.3	Average	0.56	0.9	Lean high	0.30	-1.2	Low	0.23	-1.9	Low
P-2	0.30 (0.095)	0.29	-0.1	Average	0.39	1.0	High	0.14	-1.7	Low	0.13	-1.8	Low
P-3	0.13 (0.024)	0.15	1.0	High	0.19	2.7	Very high	0.15	0.9	Lean high	0.12	-0.4	Average
P-4	0.59 (0.118)	0.43	-1.3	Low	0.53	-0.5	Average	0.60	0.1	Average	0.45	-1.2	Low
P-5	0.92 (0.019)	0.93	0.4	Average	0.90	-1.3	Low	0.90	-1.0	Low	0.95	1.2	High
I-1	0.65 (0.080)	0.55	-1.3	Low	0.60	-0.7	Lean low	0.55	-1.3	Low	0.45	-2.6	Very low
I-2	0.36 (0.067)	0.30	-1.0	Low	0.37	0.1	Average	0.26	-1.5	Low	0.25	-1.6	Low
I-3	0.23 (0.058)	0.26	0.5	Average	0.21	-0.4	Average	0.27	0.6	Lean high	0.20	-0.6	Lean low
I-4a	0.35 (0.080)	0.45	1.3	High	0.40	0.7	Lean high	0.45	1.3	High	0.54	2.4	Very high
I-4b	0.68 (0.108)	0.61	-0.6	Lean low	0.82	1.3	High	0.57	-1.0	Low	0.74	0.6	Lean high

[illegible]

these leaders' beliefs about the predictability of the political future, Bolsonaro, Chávez, and Bukele hold the view that it is certain and predictable, while Morales's score on this belief falls within the average range compared to the norming group. Regarding these leaders' perception of control over historical developments and political outcomes, Bolsonaro's and Morales's scores are lower than the average Latin American leader, while Chávez's and Bukele's views on their ability to control events are average. In terms of the role attributed to chance in political outcomes, Chávez and Bukele view it as lower than the average Latin American leader, while Morales's perception is higher than other regional leaders. Bolsonaro's beliefs on the role of chance in politics align with the norming group.

Instrumental Beliefs

In terms of instrumental beliefs related to international organisations, the four leaders share a belief that behaving in a less cooperative and more conflictual manner is the best strategy to achieve their goals. Compared to the norming group, Bolsonaro, Chávez, and Morales are also less cooperative in their tactics to pursue their goals. Bukele, however, does not stand out in this belief compared to other Latin American leaders. Regarding their approach to risks in the political arena, all four leaders present average scores, with Chávez showing a higher inclination to be risk-oriented and Morales displaying a tendency to be more risk-averse than other regional leaders. These four leaders also exhibit higher flexibility in shifting between cooperation and conflict compared to other Latin American leaders. However, their capacity to shift between words and deeds is lower than the average leader in the case of Chávez and higher in the case of Bukele. Bolsonaro leans low, and Morales leans high in this ability.

Regarding these leaders' preferences of means to exercise political power, Bolsonaro, Chávez, and Morales share a higher preference for expressions of opposition and a lower inclination to use expressions of promise than the norming group. Chávez, Morales, and Bukele display a preference for expressions of punishment. Furthermore, while Bolsonaro and Bukele prefer expressions of threat, Chávez and Morales are less inclined to employ them. Lastly, Morales and Bukele are less prone to use expressions of appeal compared to other regional leaders.

In response to one of our research questions about the potential patterns that could help shed light on these leaders' overall conflictual approach in their communication strategies about and in international organisations, particularly the UN, the results show some patterns in their instrumental beliefs. The four leaders have in common their belief that the best strategic approach to achieve their political goals is being uncooperative. They also tend to shift between conflict and cooperation more than other Latin American leaders. Moreover, these four leaders display a propensity to use negative sanctions to exercise power, preferring expressions of punishment, threat and opposition over expressions of appeal, promise, and reward.

Regarding their ideological divide, the data analysis suggests that left-leaning populist leaders share more similarities in their approach to international organisations than their right-leaning counterparts. This finding is consistent with their shared ideology and ideas regarding capitalism, the region, and their relationship with the US. Chávez and Morales, in particular, were staunch allies and supported each other during times of crisis. Both left-leaning populist leaders perceive the nature of the political universe as less friendly and more hostile than the average. Likewise, the prospect of realising their main political goals is more pessimistic than other regional leaders. In terms of these leaders' choice of tactics and strategies to face the international in the context of the UN, Chávez and Morales share a more conflictual and less cooperative approach than other Latin American leaders. As for the utility of means, both coincide in their preference for expressions of opposition to exercise political power, which is higher than other regional leaders. Their flexibility in shifting between cooperation and conflict is also higher than other leaders in the norming group.

Chávez's and Morales's negative perception of the international and their use of conflictual tactics and strategies in the UN align with their critical communication styles towards international institutions, which they see as interventionist and promoting Western interests that undermine Latin American sovereignty and development. These leaders have used the UN platform to openly criticise the organisation and its global role. Following Chávez's fiery UNGA speech in 2006, where he famously called US President George W. Bush "the devil", he made fewer appearances in the forum and focused more on boosting regional organisations in line with his ideology, such as ALBA-TCP. In contrast, Morales utilised the UN to criticise the US and the UN Security Council's decisions,

express his concerns about climate change, and seek support for Bolivia's claims to regain sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean.

Both right-leaning populist leaders share a belief in the predictability of the political future and a preference for using expressions of threats to exercise political power. They also display a non-cooperative strategic approach and higher flexibility in shifting between conflict and cooperation. However, their different ideologies could explain the few similarities observed. Bolsonaro's conflictual beliefs are amplified by his conservative and religious Nationalist companion ideology (Casarões & Farias, 2021). On the other hand, Bukele's approach to the international is more optimistic, yet he does not follow a particular thick ideology. Instead, he cherry-picks ideological aspects both domestically and internationally to achieve his political goals, such as prioritising neoliberalism and ad-hoc conservatism. Bukele has also shown admiration for Donald Trump's leadership and policies on migration, acknowledging El Salvador's role in creating migration challenges for the US (Marroquín, 2021). This pragmatic approach is grounded in his optimistic beliefs in achieving political goals, as seen in his tendency to oscillate diplomatically and commercially between China and the US to secure access to FDI and aid (Méndez, 2021).

It is worth noticing that Bukele's belief system is the one that has fewer elements in common with the other populist leaders. Considering the reduced number of leaders in this study, it is unclear whether this lack of similarity among right-wing leaders is a general pattern or whether Bukele is an outlier. On the other hand, Bolsonaro shares with the two left-leaning leaders some similarities in terms of their perceptions of the Self in the world (instrumental beliefs), showing less cooperative strategies and more conflictual tactics to pursue their objectives. He also shares with Chávez and Morales higher flexibility in shifting between cooperation and conflict and their preferences for expressions of opposition to exercise power. This study's findings suggest that Latin American populist leaders tend to share similar beliefs about the Self, despite their right-left political orientation. These results are in line with the notion that populism is a battleground between the people and the elite, which could explain the use of more conflictual tactics. Populist leaders in international politics have been depicted as promoting a Manichean view of the political world, with varying degrees, intensities, and manifestations of the people vs. the elite (Chrysogelos, 2020; Lacatus et al., Chap. 1, this volume).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the belief systems of Latin American populist leaders and their approach to multilateralism that is the UN. Through the OCA framework, we analysed the speeches of four leaders, and our findings offer three main conclusions. First, the belief systems of populist leaders differ substantially from other Latin American leaders, which can help explain their reluctance and critical approach towards the UN. Second, we found more similarities between left-wing leaders Chávez and Morales than right-wing leaders Bukele and Bolsonaro, with left-leaning leaders showing negative assessments of the international and using less cooperative tactics and strategies, while right-leaning leaders express high predictability of the future and prefer expressions of threat. Third, there is no clear indication that ideological differences can fully explain the belief systems of populist leaders, as we found both similarities and differences across left-wing and right-wing leaders. The main limitation of this study is the small sample size, which restricts the generalisability of the findings. Thus, future studies could include a larger number of leaders to achieve more conclusive results. Future research should also provide answers to the lack of similarities of right-populist beliefs vis-à-vis what seems to be a more coherent and convergent left-wing belief system of populist leaders in Latin America. Further studies on these four cases should explore the impact of thick ideologies on the similarities between Chávez and Morales and the differences between Bukele and Bolsonaro. Bukele's oscillation and cherry-picking of different aspects of existing ideologies within the centre-right spectrum contrasts with Bolsonaro's concrete ideological companion of religious and moral conservatism. Additionally, examining the status positions of these four cases in the international system is crucial. Venezuela's support and access to oil resources reduced Bolivia's negative externalities of opposing the US, while Bukele lacks this shield and adopts a pragmatic foreign policy. Bolsonaro's anti-global quest and nationalistic rhetoric have caused him to lose regional leadership. Investigating these ideological, geopolitical, and status elements can enrich the social cognitive approach used to analyse these four populist leaders. This study focused on the UN as a first step towards understanding how Latin American leaders engage with multilateral organisations through their diplomatic communication styles. However, it would be beneficial to also examine how populist leaders interact with regional organisation projects. By exploring their belief systems and

communication styles towards institutions that bring together governments with similar ideologies or that present themselves as part of the brotherhood of Latin American states, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of their approach to multilateralism.

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When Populist Friends Abroad Hurt You at Home: How Populist Leaders in Italy and the Netherlands Coped with the Russian-Ukrainian War

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INTRODUCTION

The Russian-Ukrainian war that started in 2022 embarrassed several of Russia's European political friends. Until then, Russia had enjoyed the sympathy of various politicians in Europe, particularly of right-wing populists. To such populists, strong leaders abroad, such as Russian President

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Vladimir Putin, set an example to their political aspirations and offered the prospect of potential support and recognition. Some European populists met President Putin in a formal governmental capacity (e.g., Italian Foreign Minister Luigi di Maio, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán). Others encountered him or other Russian representatives outside of official business (such as French populist leader Marine le Pen and *Vlaams Belang* frontman Philip Dewinter), or developed strong personal ties, such as Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Clearly, not all right-wing populists took a positive view of Russia: the Swedish Democrats, for instance, have long been critical of Russia and its foreign policy (Kenes, 2020, p. 34). The war has rendered warm relations with Russia and its leader a liability rather than an asset. Philip Dewinter was asked to step down as Vice President of the (regional) Flemish Parliament because of his strong ties (De Morgen, 2022). Other populist parties find it difficult to maintain a positive attitude toward Russia: the German populist *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) is heavily divided over arms deliveries to Ukraine and boycotts against Russia (ZDF, 2022). In France, Marine Le Pen's (*Rassemblement National*) chances to beat Emmanuel Macron at the April 2022 French Presidential elections were thwarted by her long-standing ties with Putin (Politico, 2022). Why were European right-wing populists so charmed with Russia and its leader? For populists in government in some countries, it was a geostrategic necessity: countries like Hungary and Italy have long been dependent on Russia for energy (Prontera, 2021). For others, particularly populists who opposed the cultural pluralism that liberal democracy embraces, it meant lining up with, and receiving recognition from, an international actor that helped prove that less pluralist notions of democracy might be a viable alternative. For others yet, interest from Russia might produce media attention and political legitimacy. For Russia, the interest lay in having allies in countries that had been critical of Russia's weakening democracy under Putin, and in reducing political cohesion within the European Union (EU).

Here, we look at right-wing populist leaders in Italy and the Netherlands and investigate the extent to which the Russian-Ukrainian war has made them redefine their position toward Russia and its president. We theorize the conditions under which leaders are open to change, even reverse, their relative perspectives on international politics, drawing on the Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis literature on cognitive beliefs and foreign policy change. Subsequently, we trace (changes in) the outlook on Russia of Dutch and Italian populist leaders. In Italy we look at the evolution of

attitudes toward Russia expressed by the three most successful Italian populist parties recently classified as ‘pro-Russian’ (Snegovaya, 2021): the Lega, the Five Star Movement (M5S), and Brothers of Italy (FdI). While Lega and FdI are usually classified as right-wing populist (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2015), M5S is often labeled a “hybrid”, “pure” populist party (Mosca & Tronconi, 2019), due to its eclectic nature and its “ideological neutrality” beyond left and right. Regarding The Netherlands, we investigate the two most vocal right-wing populist parties: Geert Wilders’s *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) and Thierry Baudet’s *Forum voor Democratie* (FvD). We examine the 2014–2017 period as the crucial period during which Russia’s standing in global politics was marred by the Sochi Olympic scandal, the annexation of Crimea, and the alleged interference in the American Presidential election campaign in 2016. For all populist leaders under examination we will describe their discursive performance and their views on Russia before and after this period of change.

POPULISTS’ ADAPTING TO CHANGE: THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

Populist leaders have early on sought support from like-minded politicians in other countries. In Europe, right-wing populists regularly meet to display solidarity and, presumably, align strategies. In 2018, there was an attempt to found The Movement, a club of anti-EU and populist actors (Politico, 2018). December 2021 saw the so-called Warsaw Summit of right-wing populists from, among other countries, Austria, France, Hungary, Poland, and Spain (Die Welt, 2021). European populists and North American conservatives also sought to establish a platform for exchange (Reuters, 2022). Nevertheless, populists do not always blend perfectly: in the current European Parliament (EP), some right-wing populists cooperate with other parties in the European Conservatives and Reformist Group, whereas others joined the Identity and Democracy Group. Yet others, like Hungary’s Fidesz, remain outside an EP political group. Fidesz left the EP’s Christian Democratic Political Group (EPP) in 2021 when expulsion seemed a real possibility.

Right-wing populists thus do not always want to be identified with one another: for example, Fidesz wanted—and still wants—to be recognized as a Christian-democratic party. Until the 2021 Warsaw Summit, the Polish PiS party was wary of being seen as close with Marine Le Pen who was considered too pro-Russian—a difficult position in Poland even before the Russian-Ukrainian war. Nevertheless, Dutch populist Geert Wilders

repeatedly showed up with Belgian populist Filip Dewinter, touring migrant-dominated suburbs of Brussels together. Also, in 2021 right-wing populist parties in EU member states, with the exception of Germany's AfD, issued a joint statement of cooperation within the EU that seemed the precursor of a separate Political Group of their own (Euronews, 2021). This brought together relatively pro-Russian populists (e.g., RN) and those who were careful to avoid close association with Russia (e.g., PiS).

The overarching interest of right-wing populists and Russian President Putin lies in conveying the plausibility that liberal democracy as professed by most European (and North American) politicians need not live up to its promises: in this narrative, liberal democracies suffer from a perceived lack of representation of citizens, fail to combat inequality, are rife with corruption and political scandal, and offer little alternation between governing elites. The more citizens embrace this narrative, the more empathy is mustered for systems that formally aspire to be a different type of democracy—an illiberal democracy. It thus reinforces the domestic status of illiberal democratic populist leaders like Hungary's Orbán and Poland's Kaczyński. For Russia, the benefit is twofold: internationally, the more the West is divided by its idea of democracy, the less democratic values can be used as a diplomatic instrument against Russia; domestically, the less the West lives up to its democratic promises, the less attractive this idea will be for Russian citizens, and the more presidential rule gains credibility as an alternative. By consequence, populist leaders were tempted not to be too critical of Russia (cf. Destradi & Plagemann, 2019).

Then came the war that posed a problem to many populists. It became more difficult to show understanding for Russia's qualms about western encirclement now that Russia had started a war of aggression. On top of that, Russia could threaten the energy security of the very people that populists claimed to defend. On a deeper level, a resurgence of the idea of Russian imperialism might well change one of the most fundamental conditions that originally helped fertilize the ground for populism: the end of the Cold War had contested the idea that Russia was a common enemy requiring unity among mainstream democratic parties (Chrysosgelos et al., 2023). A new Cold War would reduce the political space for populists and would force them to embrace more explicitly the values of liberal democracy in the face of illiberal aggression. How did populist leaders cope with that situation?

Would populist leaders stick to their narratives or would they make a *volte face* and abandon their sympathy for illiberal democracies like Russia? Answering this question depends on one's perspective on populism. If one defines populism as a strategy for gaining power, then populist leaders will engage in opportunistic policy change, parallel to their assessment of where to obtain electoral gain or avoid electoral loss (Weyland, 2017). If one approaches populism as a thin ideology that juxtaposes corrupt elites with the pure people, combined with elements from another ideology (Mudde, 2004), one would expect populist leaders to remain as close as possible to their narrative, certainly where they pit elites against people. "Loss aversion theory" (Welch, 2005) offers a causal mechanism for the former perspective, while "Cognitive dissonance reduction theory" (Festinger, 1957) provides the causal mechanism for the latter. Whereas cognitive dissonance reduction theory helps us understand the cognitive unease experienced by politicians, loss aversion theory provides a clue as to which dissonance reduction strategy they apply.

Cognitive dissonance theory starts from the premise that individuals cannot receive and process all information incentives coming toward them (Cancino-Montecinos et al., 2020). Therefore, an individual needs a belief system to select information incentives and interpret them to be able to act. If new information contradicts the available belief system, the individual needs to redress the imbalance between information and belief system. Three major options are available: adjusting the belief system to the new information, adjusting the new information to the belief system, or trivializing the perceived discrepancy. Because the first option is harder to accomplish, most individuals likely opt for the latter two strategies. This may involve ignoring the presence of new information, but also producing rationalizations to make contradictory information fit the existing belief system. Cognitive dissonance reduction theory is particularly adamant that so-called master beliefs will remain intact. In case of populist leaders, we would expect their specific notion of the people versus the elite to be central to their world orientation and therefore to remain unscathed. Other elements in their ideologies might be subject to reinterpretation. David Welch's (2005) loss aversion theory, which relies on cognitive psychology, organization theory, and prospect theory, helps us understand foreign policy change (FPC): whereas the scholarly debate agrees that radical FPC is unusual (Hermann, 1990; Joly & Haesebrouck, 2021), Welch argues that radical change becomes possible when foreign policy fails repeatedly or catastrophically, or when leaders become convinced that

failure is imminent. Leaders are more likely to embrace the risks and costs of FPC to avoid losses than to realize gains. Loss aversion causes leaders to embrace change when they expect the status quo to generate continued painful loss (Welch, 2005, p. 42). Such a framework is useful to understand the conditions under which populist leaders—who are extremely sensitive to the “support” of domestic audiences (the “people!”) accept the inherent costs of (embracing the risks in) FP change.

CASE SELECTION

This contribution will focus on Italy and the Netherlands for three reasons. First, both countries have been dependent on Russia for oil and gas for a considerable time. Italy has always been prepared to ignore European or Atlantic unease over autocratic energy suppliers to ensure its energy imports (Giacomello & Verbeek, 2011). The Netherlands became more dependent in the 2010s since earthquakes in the gas winning region of Groningen urged it to reduce its own gas production. Second, both countries have been home to populist parties for decades. Importantly, in both countries populist parties were crucial participants in (or supporters of) various governments. In The Netherlands the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF) was a full-fledged member of the coalition (2002), whereas Wilders’s PVV formally agreed to support the Rutte I minority government (2010–2012). Italy is well-known for the continued electoral success of populist leaders in the last decades. Interestingly, the Conte I government with *Lega* and *M5S* (2018–2019) was the first Western European government without a single mainstream party, making Italy ruled “exclusively by anti-establishment forces” (Orsina, 2019, p.1). Third, in the 2010s populists spoke highly of Russia in both countries. Italian populist parties developed a “special relationship” with Vladimir Putin. In The Netherlands leaders of FvD and PVV looked favorably to the Russian President.

ITALY

Populists and Putin Before the War

The relationship between Italian populist parties and Vladimir Putin has been noteworthy. To understand these *liasons dangereuses*, we first look at the ideological traits of these parties and then assess the kind of relationship they developed with Moscow in recent years. Silvio Berlusconi’s

portrayal of Putin reflects the common attitude of all Italian populist parties toward Putin's regime. Berlusconi developed a personal friendship with Putin for years, justifying the invasion of Crimea, praising the Russian leader for his qualities, and defining him a "warrior for the freedom and for the democracy of his country" (L'Espresso, 2022). Berlusconi has also constantly stressed his personal role in promoting a positive relationship between Western countries and Russia, as occurred in 2002 when Italy hosted a NATO–Russia summit (Pantucci & Ambrosetti, 2022, p.10). The Lega—that Salvini transformed from a regionalist political actor into a national-wide populist radical right party (Albertazzi et al., 2018)—has been the party closest to Putin, signing an agreement of collaboration with Putin's United Russia in 2017. These ties "became embarrassing in 2019 when members of the League were accused of seeking illegal party funding from Russia" (Bordignon et al., 2022, 4). Others stress how Salvini considers Putin a model for his government style, "a giant", and an "an ally in undermining the EU". After the war of 2014, Salvini affirmed before the EU Parliament that Putin's Russia was more democratic than the EU, referring to Crimea "not simply as a 'Russian', but as a 'liberated' territory waiting for international recognition" (Makarychev & Terry, 2020, p.27). Indeed, "like Berlusconi, Salvini admired the Russian president's political successes. [...] In contrast with the FI leader, Salvini shared with Putin a belief in the importance of defending Christian values, while admiring his autocratic position in the Russian political system" (Bordignon et al., 2022, p.4). The leader of FdI, Giorgia Meloni, offered her congratulations to Putin on Twitter for his electoral victory in March 2018, stressing the "unequivocal willingness of the Russian people". Such discursive performance was strongly related to FdI's identity, which displayed sovereigntist and Eurosceptic views (Zulianello, 2019), adopting an electoral manifesto in 2018 that emphasized the need of "taking back control of national sovereignty" (Chrysogelos, 2017). Also, some members of the M5S have expressed sympathy for Putin, even participating (with the current Undersecretary of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Manlio Di Stefano) at the convention of Putin's party. Di Stefano considered Ukraine (in 2016) as a "puppet state in the hands of USA and NATO" (L'Espresso, 2022). While criticizing Russia's actions in Ukraine, the M5S opposed EU sanctions against Moscow, arguing that, "the Italian government is too subservient to its European and NATO allies and neglects the national interest" (Siddi, 2019, p.127). After the Russian invasion of Crimea, Lega, FdI, and M5S all wanted to end the sanctions against Moscow. Especially

for the Lega, economic considerations came into play. The Northern regions—the party’s main reservoir of votes—had been hit the hardest by the effects of EU sanctions and Russian countersanctions” (Siddi, 2019, p.128). The Lega, like the other parties, was “well aware that it cannot deliver on the promise of lifting the sanctions, but it can still blame others (at the EU level) for this” (Makarychev & Terry, 2020, p.27). *Lega* also voted against (with the M5S abstaining) on a motion in the European Parliament condemning the attempt to kill the leader of the Russian opposition, Andrey Navalny. M5S and *Lega* emphasized this point in their Yellow-Green coalition “contract”, which portrayed Russia as a partner rather than a menace (Coticchia, 2021). On the whole, all these “Russian sympathizing parties” (Bordignon et al., 2022), illustrate what the literature (Onderco, 2019; Snegovaya, 2021) has defined as “a populist link” with Putin’s regime.

Italian Populist Parties and Putin During the War

The Italian-Russian “special relationship” was not endorsed by populist parties only. Irrespective of the ideological affinity between Italian populists and Putin, “Italy has been one of the leading advocates in the EU of dialogue and cooperation with Russia [...]. Italy has consistently sought to hedge between its close transatlantic ties and its longstanding connections with Moscow (Pantucci & Ambrosetti, 2022, p.1). Because of Russia’s growing strategic role in areas vital to Italian interests (Libya, the Mediterranean, fighting ISIL in Syria), “Italy’s interest in mediating and facilitating the de-escalation of tensions between Russia and the West was functional to Rome’s goal of reconciling its quest for cooperation with Moscow with its commitment to the Euro-Atlantic community” (Siddi, 2019, p.132).

Interestingly, however, despite these traditional ties between Italy and Russia, Italy’s energy dependence on Moscow, and the “special relationship” between Italian populists and Vladimir Putin, the Draghi government (2021–2022) abandoned hedging: it strongly condemned the Russian attack on Ukraine, provided economic and military support to Kiev, and sustained EU sanctions against Moscow. Indeed, 24 February 2022 proved a watershed in Italian-Russian relations. The Draghi government, a technocratic government backed by most Italian parties (but not FdI), described the invasion as a profound assault on European security (Kazmin, 2022). *Lega*, M5S, and FdI supported all governmental measures adopted since February 2022. While after the 2014 Russian invasion

of Crimea, Berlusconi endorsed the annexation, criticized EU sanctions against Moscow, and praised Putin's leadership, all populist parties condemned the 2022 Russian invasion. The parliamentary votes confirmed the large bipartisan consensus that generally marks Italian foreign policy (Coticchia & Vignoli, 2020). It also corroborates the hypothesis that Italy supports its traditional allies in crisis situations (Natalizia & Morini, 2020). Parties in parliament generally remained loyal to the government: its communications and decrees (e.g., 25 February, 1 March, 19 May, 21 June) were adopted with over 80% of the vote, with sporadic "rebel votes" by M5S and *Lega*. Yet, populist leaders soon acted differently in public debate. Matteo Salvini distanced himself from Putin, condemning the invasion and showing solidarity outside Ukraine's embassy in Rome. In the Senate, on 1 March, he affirmed that, "there is an aggressor and a victim and we should stand with the victim". Salvini also visited the Ukrainian-Polish border, where a local mayor used Salvini's 2014 pro-Putin T-shirt to defy him in front of the cameras. M5S also supported the government and, when one of its MPs (the President of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee) voted against the motion advanced by the majority coalition on 1 March, the party expelled its member. Finally, Meloni—who was elected President of the European Conservatives and Reforming Party (ECR) in 2020—firmly condemned Moscow and strongly supported Ukraine, renewing FdI's Western and European commitments. FdI has consistently supported all governmental decisions on Ukraine, thus spreading abroad the image of a reliable, pro-Western conservative party.

In the first days of the war, the Italian "populist sympathizers" of Putin changed their views. After 24 February, continuing the "Putin lovers" image would have increased their reputational costs in the West. In line with loss aversion theory, leaders abandoned the status quo (their pro-Putin positions) to avoid painful loss. However, whereas initially Italian public opinion converged on support for Kiev, this changed after several weeks, and political parties followed suit. Salvini "correctly felt that a large part of Italians [were] not comfortable with the mainstream position of supporting Ukraine and blaming only Russia" (De Luca, 2022). Oddly enough, Salvini adopted a "pacifist position", pushing for a diplomatic solution while criticizing the deployment of weapons he had voted for (La Repubblica, 2022). While Italy's television talk shows gave plenty of air-time to Moscow sympathizers, Salvini adopted a novel discourse, drawing on the relevance of peace, against the "warmongers" of the EU (Sebastiani,

2020), and asking Biden on Twitter to “lower the tones”. Before the regional elections in the Spring, his “old” Euroscepticism had come back, while “a pacifist” Salvini openly considered the deployment of weapons to Kyiv as an obstacle to peace (Cicchitto, 2022). Elections mattered, as illustrated by the evolution of Italian attitudes toward the war. In April 60% of Italians preferred a diplomatic solution to “supporting Ukraine at any cost” (RAI, 2022). Interestingly, 36% of right-wing voters considered the Russian invasion somehow “justified”. Italy was the only G7 country where Russia not seen as a major risk (Munich Security Brief, 2022). Ukraine was considered the major obstacle to peace by 35% of Italians (while 39% identified Russia as the main impediment to a diplomatic solution) (Krastev & Leonard, 2022). On Twitter, Salvini constantly emphasized that he agreed with the majority of Italians who refused to send weapons to Ukraine. He also criticized sanctions, emphasizing their limited results and the never-ending “Italian need of Russian gas”. Subsequently, M5S also moved toward a more qualified position. While affirming his loyalty to the coalition, Conte announced to work on a resolution to avoid an escalation in the procurement of weapons to Ukraine. M5S’s criticism of the government’s war policies led to an open conflict with pro-Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs—and former M5S leader—Luigi Di Maio, who decided to abandon M5S, taking with him dozens of MPs (Rainews, 2022).

The scholarly debate (Coticchia & Vignoli, 2020; Diodato, 2022) has emphasized the gap between M5S’s anti-war discourse and the stunning continuity in its defense policies (missions, procurement, etc.) when in government (Coticchia, 2021). From a theoretical point of view, Salvini and Conte started focusing on the “domestic costs” of Italy’s support to Kyiv, doubting sanctions and military aid. Indeed, after the war’s initial days, the two leaders aimed at the (large) domestic audience that was skeptical of supporting Ukraine at any cost. At the same time, inter-party competition interfered: while Meloni vocally stated her firm pro-Western (and Ukrainian) position—still criticizing the EU for inflation, Conte and Salvini needed to mark their relative positions (the latter criticizing Di Maio and the former emphasizing traditional pacifist opposition to increased military spending). Eventually, the resistance to meet NATO spending commitments and the growing criticism over Italy’s military assistance to Ukraine pushed M5S to end its support for the government (Bechis, 2022). Thus, with M5S voting for sending more aid to Kyiv, Conte’s comments opened the political crisis: Salvini and Berlusconi

exploited the contrast between Draghi and Conte, dropped their support for the government, which then collapsed (The Conversations, 2022), provoking elections that would usher in Meloni as Prime Minister.

THE NETHERLANDS

Populists and Russia Before the War

Celebrating 400 years of Dutch-Russian relations by commemorating Czar Peter's study trip to the Netherlands and organizing exhibitions and music and ballet performances, the year 2013 was meant to mark the good relations between the two countries. Actually, the year produced many frictions, including Dutch unease over a new Russian law punishing "non-traditional sexual relations", the arrest in Russia of the crew of the Dutch-registered Greenpeace ship *Arctic Sunrise*, and the arrest of a Russian diplomat in The Hague on grounds of domestic violence. The following year, the relationship would sour with the Russian invasion and annexation of the Crimea, the violent conflict in Ukraine's Donbas region, and particularly the suspected Russian role in the downing of flight MH17 over Ukraine, causing the death of 298 passengers, among which 198 Dutch citizens.

Around the time Vladimir Putin started his third term as Russian President in 2012, scholars observed that Putin appealed to populists from the left and the right. In the Netherlands, where populist parties had attracted between 20 and 25% of the national vote since 2002 (except 2003 [12.4%]), the PVV was accused of showing a Janus face of being critical of Russia at home, but effectively supporting Russia's foreign policy goals in practice (Political Capital Institute 2014, p.6). Indeed, Wilders's presence at a European-wide far right parties' meeting in Turin, also hosting Viktor Zdobych (MP for Putin's United Fatherland Party), was seen as indicative of this. It has always been difficult to classify Wilders's PVV: because of its defense of the welfare state and of women's and LGBTQIA+ rights, and the relative absence of advocating strong leadership, it could not be simply cast as far right; at the same time, its islamophobia and resistance to immigration and, by consequence, to multiculturalism earned the PVV the label of nativist populism (Mudde, 2014). The PVV's ideological traits show in its anti-EU attitude: the European Union represents the agent that opens the door to immigration from both outside and inside the EU. At the same time, the PVV portrays

the EU as transferring Dutch people's money to spendthrift and corrupt countries in the EU's south. Within this context, the PVV in the early 2010s did not explicitly support or condemn Russia in its foreign policy (indeed, it does not surface in its 2012, 2014, or 2017 election programs). The events of 2014 would be fitted into that general mold.

Dutch Populists, Russia, and Ukraine

When in early 2014 events started unfolding at Kyiv's Maidan Square, the EU (together with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) was contemplating a 11 billion euro package for Ukraine. In the Dutch parliament, various parties criticized this package, most vocally Geert Wilders, who complained about Ukraine's weak anti-corruption policies and the transfer of Dutch taxpayers' money to a state outside the EU. His diatribe occurred 2 weeks before the Dutch would elect regional assemblies and, indirectly, the Dutch Senate; in May 2014 the EU would hold elections for the European Parliament. The debate coincided with the Maidan Square protests where Members of the European Parliament joined the calls for the resignation of the pro-Russian Ukrainian President Yanukovich. Wilders referred to 'inciting europhiles' holding 'imperialistic dreams' (based on *Handelingen Tweede Kamer* 5 March, 2014). Wilders's position followed logically from his view of the EU, but clearly served Russia's interest in deterring the EU from supporting regime change in Kyiv. Shortly after Maidan and Yanukovich's flight, Russia struck in the Crimea. Dutch political parties were not as quick to condemn Russian interference in 2014 as they would be in 2022. Motions explicitly condemning Russian behavior as a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty or as aggression were only backed by a minority of *Christen-Democratisch Appèl* (Christian-Democratic Appeal; CDA), D66, and *GroenLinks*; the government supported the preparation of phased EU sanctions against Russia, but at the same time continued the preparation of a Dutch trade mission to Moscow as part of the biannual World Energy Forum. The PVV consistently argued against sanctions against Russia and against EU financial support for Ukraine (*Handelingen Tweede Kamer* 13 March 2014; 18 March 2014).

The downing of flight M17 on 17 July 2014, the wave of emotions it stirred throughout Dutch society and the ensuing discussion on Russian involvement and responsibility changed the general attitude of Dutch political parties and government toward Russia. The PVV joined in condemning Russia for its involvement in shooting the aircraft, but retained

its position that EU activism at Maidan Square had contributed to escalation, and remained skeptical about sanctions, because they would hurt the Dutch economy. When pressed, PVV MP Beertens stated that Islam-inspired terrorism (ISIS) posed a bigger threat to Dutch security than East-Ukrainian separatism (Handelingen Tweede Kamer 2 September 2014). At the same time, the PVV supported reinforcing the military in the context of events in Eastern Europe as long as this would not require new funding, suggesting to abort Dutch military missions to Mali and Afghanistan instead (Handelingen Tweede Kamer 13 November 2022).

From 2015 the debate focuses on the EU Association Treaty with Ukraine, which had been concluded in 2014. This mobilized a broad coalition of left-wing and right-wing opponents that succeeded in collecting enough signatures to hold a consultative referendum, a direct democracy device that had been in place since 1 June 2015. The turnout narrowly surpassed the required threshold of 30% of the electorate. A majority of 61% rejected adoption of the treaty, forcing the government to reconsider and require a guarantee from ‘Brussels’ that the treaty would not automatically lead to full membership. On that promise, the Dutch parliament endorsed the treaty in May 2017. Importantly, the anti-treaty campaign propelled Thierry Baudet into the spotlight, who after the referendum founded a new party *Forum voor Democratie* (FvD). The 2017 electoral manifestos of PVV and FvD demanded that parliament would reject the treaty. Neither manifesto mentioned the MH17 crash. The PVV again pointed to Brussels as the enemy: “europhiles” had “forced the Treaty down the throat” of the Dutch citizen (Partij voor de Vrijheid, 2017: 3 [unnumbered]). FvD presented an analysis that held Russia in the clear: it considered the treaty as a major cause of the violent conflict within Ukraine and of its conflict with Russia (Forum voor Democratie, 2017, p.8). It called for normalizing relations with Russia and for reintroducing visas for Ukrainian travelers. Sanctions should be abolished as they only harmed the Dutch agricultural sector (Forum voor Democratie, 2017, p.22).

Although supportive of the sanctions, the PVV opened up to Russia in the following years. In March 2018, Wilders visited Moscow as a counterpoint to “hysterical Russophobia”, meeting a junior member of Putin’s government. Wilders stated that Russia was an ally in the battle against terrorism and immigration from Africa and described Putin as a “true patriot”. He even expressed doubts regarding the Russian origins of the BUK missile that took down MH17 (Nederlands Dagblad, 2018). In its 2021 electoral program the PVV argued that bad relations with Russia

were detrimental to Dutch interests and called for a normalization of relations. Importantly, however, the PVV insisted on the persecution of responsible individuals for the MH17 tragedy including responsible state actors and favored continuation of related sanctions (Partij voor de Vrijheid, 2021, p.48). FvD's 2021 program did not mention MH17 and called for restoring Dutch-Russian relations (Forum voor Democratie, 2021, p.38).

On 24 February 2022, the PVV clearly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine labeling it a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty. It called the West's earlier suggestion that Ukraine might eventually join NATO a blunder, but explicitly stated that this could never justify the Russian invasion. Wilders endorsed the assistance of Ukrainian refugees, calling them 'real refugees', but preferred accommodation in the region. In subsequent months, the war surfaced in Wilders's tweets only infrequently: Wilders communicated mostly on Islam, migration, energy prices, and on the daily death threats he continues to receive. In his tweets Wilders mainly instrumentally referred to the war in order to criticize the Dutch government: imposing sanctions would harm Dutch citizens and would not stop Russia from selling oil and gas elsewhere and thus financing its war machine; Ukrainian refugees would be welcome in the Netherlands, provided the government expelled asylum seekers from Africa and Syria; generally, Wilders presented a frame that the government's policies were detrimental to the interest of the Dutch citizens: "I have sympathy for Ukrainians but I represent the one million Dutch citizens who have elected me" (Wilders tweet 18 March 2022). In doing so, he would portray Prime Minister Rutte and Finance Minister Sigrid Kaag as part of a cosmopolitan elite who would discuss the war while drinking champagne at the Davos World Forum (Wilders tweet 21 May 2022).

The war frequently surfaced in Baudet's analyses of current events on FvD's website and in his tweets. Interestingly, Baudet, while regretting the human suffering, refused to condemn or endorse the Russian invasion and instead took the position that there is no morality in international politics. Proposing that international conflicts are shady and complex, he found plausible Russian claims that the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine might have asked for Russian support; that EU and NATO invitations to Ukraine in the 2010s formed the root cause; and that the West had violated norms regarding territorial change in Kosovo and Libya. To Baudet, the war fits the bigger picture of the Great Reset, the theme of the Davos World Economic Forum. To Baudet, wary of conspiring elites, Covid and

the Western reaction to Russia formed part of an attempt to govern the world economy at the expense of national sovereignty (Handelingen Tweede Kamer 28 February 2022). In his current affairs analyses on FvD's website, Baudet depicted NATO's expansion, the color revolutions, as well as the Arab Spring as part of a long term American objective of regime changes globally. Given Ukraine's vital geopolitical position, Baudet refuses to condemn or endorse Russia, but proposes a neutral Ukraine as a way out of the crisis (Baudet, 2022). Unsurprisingly, FvD opposes Ukrainian EU membership and announced its active opposition to the ratification of an accession treaty (Forum voor Democratie, 2022). The FvD's implosion after 2021 and further demise of the CDA paved the way for a new political party: the Farmer Citizen Movement (BBB). Defying classification, BBB exploits discontent around the dormant Dutch center-periphery political cleavage, winning the 2023 regional and Senate elections. It vehemently condemns Russia, but frames the Dutch interest in the conflict in terms of food security and thus in reinforcing the position of the agricultural sector.

CONCLUSION

Populist leaders who used to take a sympathetic view on Russia and its leader arrived at a fork in the road when Russia struck against Ukraine in February 2022. Of course, the challenge was more salient for populists in government, like in Italy, who had to decide on foreign policy, than for populists in opposition, like in the Netherlands, who could watch from the side stage. Nevertheless, all populists faced a potential loss of support because of the general condemnation of Russian aggression. This chapter argued that these politicians face cognitive dissonance because of the war and that any complete *volte face* on Russia would depend on their fear of losing their constituents' support.

In the Netherlands right-wing populists differ in their response to the Russian-Ukrainian war. Geert Wilders and his PVV clearly distance themselves from the war, explicitly condemning Russian aggression. Thierry Baudet and his FvD do not embrace the Russian position but engage actively and frequently in attempts to "counterbalance" what they consider the media's pro-Ukrainian bias and to give room to alternative perspectives, including the Russian. FvD goes furthest by pointing to the West when looking for the deeper causes of the war. Both populist parties

reject sanctions against Russia, as they are counterproductive and hurt the people in the Netherlands.

From a theoretical perspective, both parties interpret the events since February 2022 from their dominant political beliefs. Wilders consistently talks about the effects for the Dutch people—the one million citizens who voted for him. Indeed, he hammers on the suffering of the Dutch people in terms of inflation and the effect of sanctions, lambasting the Dutch political elite whom he always presents as neglecting the people. Interestingly, since the outbreak of the war he no longer talks about Putin as an admirable politician: it is not opportune to present the Russian leader as an ally against terrorism and migration. Baudet, on the other hand, frequently addresses the war and the disinformation that he perceives. Indeed, it fits his dominant beliefs regarding the elites and the people: to him, supporting Ukraine in this war is part of, or plays into the hands of, a larger elitist threat: the ideas of the cosmopolitan elites, symbolized by the Davos World Forum, to reset the world economy.

Both Dutch leaders thus engage in cognitive dissonance reduction: Wilders by focusing on the domestic effects of the war in the Netherlands, Baudet by presenting ‘alternative information’ to the dominant news. In terms of loss aversion theory, both Wilders’s reluctance to praise Putin as he has in the past and his explicit condemnation of Russia’s aggression fit the theory: these adjustments are necessary to not to lose touch with the feelings of his electorate. Baudet, on the contrary, seems prepared to actively defy the dominant narrative and thus looks undaunted by electoral risks. Indeed, public opinion research suggests that not even 5% of FvD supporters see Russia as a threat in contrast to over 50% of PVV voters (Houtkamp et al., 2022). Maybe this is understandable as FvD seems less and less interested in having impact through elections but presents itself increasingly as an alternative social bubble (Het Parool, 2021).

In Italy, the war, during its first weeks, fostered a relevant change in populist parties that had expressed strong support for Putin for years. Friendship, admiration, and ideological affinity with the Putin had indeed shaped the Salvini’s and Berlusconi’s views even after the 2014 war. In the case of the Lega, “the backlash against liberal values, criticism of the EU and of its handling of the refugee crisis, as well as the claim of being the ‘defenders of Christian Europe’, constitute[d] the ideological foundations of this alignment” (Siddi, 2019, p. 128). To a lesser extent, FdI and M5S also praised Putin, while criticizing the EU approach to Moscow. Until 2022, all Italian governments aimed to foster dialogue with Russia, which

was never viewed as a threat by leaders or public opinion. Economic and political ties, along with the perceived increased Russian influence in the Mediterranean, contributed to frame Moscow as a crucial interlocutor rather than a menace or an enemy.

However, “Italy’s strong condemnation of Russia’s actions points to a rethinking regarding its ties with Moscow, despite public attitudes to the war and the continued interest of Italian businesses in maintaining relations” (Pantucci & Ambrosetti, 2022, p.22). Our framework allows us to understand the evolution of the attitudes expressed by Italian populist leaders. In line with the “loss-aversion” theory of foreign policy change, those actors became convinced that after 24 February 2022 continued support for Putin would have brought unacceptable reputational costs within the West, thus promoting a change in their public utterances. Meloni—whose “pro-Putinism” was less evident than that of Berlusconi and Salvini – exploited the opportunity to enhance FdI’s international credentials, firmly sustaining Western decisions on Ukraine. The other leaders engaged in cognitive dissonance reduction, deeply focusing on the domestic costs of war, from the effects of sanctions to the price of gas, interpreting the conflict from their dominant beliefs, such as “pacifism” against international elites who would prefer enhanced military spending on diplomatic solutions. After some weeks of unity, tensions also exploded within the majority coalition. The breakup of Draghi’s government in July 2022 exposed the “divergences in Italy’s wider politics, as well as its relationship with Russia in particular” (Pantucci & Ambrosetti, 2022, p.22). Future studies should look in detail at the ways through which Italian populist parties have dealt with Russia also during the Meloni government.

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Crisis Populism: The Thick Ideological Core of Populist Politics in Turkey

Ole Frahm and Dirk Lehmkuhl

INTRODUCTION

The financial crisis of 2008 ushered in a sustained economic recession that in many places brought latent discontent with the political system to new heights. This discontent fuelled the rise of populist parties and politicians. While some saw the populist challenge as a healthy corrective to the stale politics of the post-Cold War consensus (Canovan, 2002), the dominant narrative is that populists constitute a threat to liberal democracy. This threat is due to “populists’ persistent delegitimization of democratic institutions” (Bonikowski, 2016, p. 11) and because populists are inherently opposed to a pluralist vision of politics and society (Müller, 2017). However, while the study of populism has seen an unabated increase in popularity, the same cannot be said for the electoral fate and fortunes of

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populist parties. Hence, the dearth of output on how populists in decline and especially populists in power that are at risk of losing support react and respond to this crisis is an important lacuna in the study of populism (see also Ketola & Odmalm, [this volume](#)). Seeing how the U.S. barely averted a coup d'état attempt at the tail-end of the right-wing populist Trump presidency, this is a question of more than mere academic interest. Contemporary Turkey is a highly salient empirical case study to further our understanding of populists in decline. The ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi = AKP) has governed the country for two decades. The AKP and its long-time leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have consistently been considered a right-wing populist party and leader respectively, with a clear consensus for the period of rule since about 2011. This is well-justified given the pervasive use of populist juxtapositions of people-versus-elite throughout the AKP's time in government and across a range of political and societal arenas. Finally, the AKP has had to confront a pronounced decline in popularity and President Erdoğan only barely won re-election in May 2023 with 52% compared to 48% for opposition candidate Kılıçdaroğlu.

In this chapter we therefore seek to expand upon prior research of populism by assessing how populist parties in power react to strains and stresses (Kaltwasser & Taggart, [2016](#)). Our guiding assumption is that in times of crisis, populists will show their true colours. What we therefore want to examine is to what extent populists may, in fact, tolerate a dip in popularity in order to maintain ideological coherence even if that threatens their electoral success. More precisely, we seek to evaluate when and to what extent populist parties in power hold onto or shift away from specific political positions that are central to their populist messaging. In doing so, we will focus on policies that stand at the core of the populists' message and political communication agenda and are thus both entrenched and well-known parts of the political package the populists present to their target electorate. Our hypothesis is that while populists discard some of their ancillary policies from their offering, they hold onto others regardless of whether they increase or decrease their popularity. By way of a process of elimination, these policies are then what we take to be the populists' core beliefs. The clear advantage of this methodological approach is that it is generally nigh impossible to establish a political actor's genuine underlying motivations, which holds with added force for populist actors. Moreover, by determining a populist actors' core beliefs, we can add empirical material to the theoretical debate over whether populists are

ideologically thin and lack any core beliefs or whether they have ‘thick’ ideological persuasions.

THIN OR THICK POPULISTS

The way we understand and define populism and populist politics is in line with the ideational approach to populism (e.g. Mudde, 2007). This means that we take populist politics to mean a specific form of political framing which pitches what are considered the genuine people against an out-of-touch elite. A populist actor is therefore one who consistently utilizes this elite-vs-the-people framing device. This agenda and the policies proposed in it are said to be in service of the people and in opposition to the elites as the populists conceive them. The advantage of choosing the ideational approach is that it allows for a better comparative focus than more restrictive definitions such as the socio-cultural approach (e.g. Ostiguy, 2020) or the political-institutional approach (e.g. Weyland, 2001). While the latter approaches specify in greater detail what a populist actor is and does, the ideational approach’s minimal definition allows us to include a greater number of potential cases into the analysis.

Beyond exploring the Turkish case, this chapter aims to advance theory-building in a field still driven by empirical studies (Kaltwasser et al., 2017). As such, we focus on one of the longest-standing puzzles in the study of populism, i.e. the question of whether populists build their politics on a thin or a thick ideological basis (Freedon, 2017). The camp that treats populist parties as informed by a thin ideology considers populists as highly flexible when it comes to the content of the policies they propose (Taggart, 2000). In other words, populists are thought of as strategic and opportunistic agents that are willing to adapt their policy responses when conditions change and, for example, their original message becomes less popular (Hadiz & Chrysosgelos, 2017). The alternative contention is that populist actors hold certain positions out of genuine ideological persuasion (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019). The message and policy package populists offer, so the argument, is anything but arbitrary and grounded in deep-seated beliefs. What is at stake in this debate is the very definition of what constitutes a populist: are populists sufficiently clearly delineated from other political actors by their use of the juxtaposition between ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’ rhetoric and programme or are populists’ programmes and ideological beliefs to be taken seriously as genuine and largely unaltering.

The second theoretical exploration that we engage with is an off-shoot from the thin-vs-thick debate and deals with the way populists in power respond to a sustained drop in popularity. For populist parties to come to power and to hold on to power in successive elections, advantageous conditions need to be in place. For one, populists rely on a widespread sense of alienation from political processes as they oftentimes capitalize on a state of crisis to win broader support for their particular message (Caiani & Graziano, 2019). Once in power, populists continue with the characteristic discursive polarization and seek to either dismantle or seize control of existing state institutions while using the state's resources to reward their clientele (Pappas, 2019, p. 71). In addition, populists in power seek to maintain their popularity with attacks on easily identifiable domestic and foreign elites such as academics, businessmen, journalists or bureaucrats (Jungkunz et al., 2021) whom they decry as antithetical enemies of the people. Crucially, however, many of the necessary conditions for holding onto power such as economic growth and a weak and disorganized political opposition are at least to some extent outside of the populists' control.

What we therefore want to assess is when and under which conditions a populist actor abandons or substantially alters core pieces of their populist political messaging when the enabling conditions for populist success turn for the worse (see also Frahm & Lehmkuhl, 2021, p. 536). As evidenced by Donald Trump's response to the Covid crisis, populist incumbents may deliberately fail to adjust their policies and instead double-down on their "tried and tested political ideas and style" (Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021, p. 2). Moreover, populist politicians tend to value consistency due to a well-founded conviction that flip-flopping on established positions may cost them at the next elections (Sorek et al., 2018). Thus, what we will look at is how a specific populist government, Turkey's AKP, reacts to fundamental and prolonged challenges to its core policies that threaten to erode its popular appeal. The hypothesis we operate with is that beyond the bluster of 'bullshit politics' (Meibauer in this volume), most populists do in fact possess a set of core ideological persuasions. These thick beliefs only reveal themselves, however, when populists' popularity is tested.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY TURKISH POPULISM

To accomplish our research objectives, we will depict the AKP's populist approach in different subfields of politics such as economic, cultural and foreign policy. For each subfield we will highlight external and internal

challenges that have emerged and assess how the AKP has responded, e.g. by adjusting or holding onto its established positions. The AKP has been the party of government since winning an absolute majority of seats in the 2002 elections. Following successive election victories in 2007 and 2011, the party developed a strongly majoritarian conception of democracy and came to conceive of “elections as the manifestation of the ‘nation’s will’ (milli irade) and the sole source of democratic legitimacy” (Akkoyunlu & Öktem, 2016, p. 510). A popular referendum in 2017 established a presidential system on the very claim that politicians require a direct unfiltered mandate from the people (Selçuk, 2016; Yabancı, 2016, p. 600) and AKP leader Erdoğan won the inaugural presidential elections in 2018. Moreover, in the aftermath of the failed coup d’état of 2016, the Turkish government purged not only alleged coup supporters but also many other oppositional figures from the state apparatus and from sectors in the economy (Esen & Gumuscu, 2017, p. 69).

However, the AKP’s original image of representing Turkey’s marginalized groups neglected by the former elites had already begun to shift. The AKP deliberately sought to divide the working class into informal labour bound to the party through clientelistic links and formal labour whose rights the party circumscribed (Özdemir, 2020, p. 260). By the 2013 Gezi Park protests, the government had given up the pretense of caring for those socio-economic cleavages that were not in line with its vision of a pious conservative neoliberal society in a developmentalist state (Keyman, 2014, p. 29). And after years in power, the AKP itself became vulnerable to the charge of having morphed into an out-of-touch elite. Before the 2018 presidential elections, the opposition’s candidate for president, Muharrem İnce, thus inverted Erdoğan’s own populist trope (Arat-Koç, 2018) by depicting himself as the ordinary “black Turk” who stood in contrast to Erdoğan, the elitist “white Turk” (Taş, 2018, p. 7).

Since approximately 2018, several parallel crises—some outside the AKP leadership’s control, some a direct result of government policies—have dramatically shifted the political environment the Turkish government operates in. These crises include a slowing economy, rising inflation and spiralling cost of living, the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. In turn, the government’s popularity has come under serious strain. Several leading party members have left the AKP, founded new parties and joined an alliance of opposition parties (Başkan et al., 2022). The period since 2018 thus marks the first time the AKP has suffered from a persistent decline in popular support (Esen, 2022). Hence, to assess the

impact these crises have had on populism in Turkey, we need to look at the evolution of discourses and policies in which the AKP has framed its policies and approach in explicitly populist terms.

Cultural Populism

A core element has been the AKP's claim to represent the pious conservative masses silenced and neglected by the ruling secular political class going back to the founding of the Turkish Republic (Özbudun, 2006). Erdoğan employed this populist anti-establishment trope "to humiliate and discredit the political and diplomatic cadres established in Turkey before the AKP came to power, and thereby to portray himself and the new cadres as authentic, humble and genuinely embedded in the Turkish culture and society" (Kaliber & Kaliber, 2019, p. 9). Thus, the AKP has revived and "ideologically instrumentalized the Ottoman heritage" (Kaya et al., 2020, p. 367) to counter what they see as the excessive social modernization drive of the Kemalist era. Societal groups that oppose the AKP's vision of the virtuous people are on the other hand "labelled as enemies of the nation and the people" (Yabancı, 2016, p. 599). The government has, for example, targeted women and LGBTQ groups and depicted gender equality as a Western value not to be imposed on Turkish society. When the Turkish president in 2021 singlehandedly denounced the Istanbul Convention to protect women against violence, it was purportedly on the grounds that the Convention had been used to normalize homosexuality (Bodur Ün & Arian, 2021, pp. 954–55).

The spirit of rehabilitating the pre-Republican past also extends to highly symbolic steps such as the rededication of the Hagia Sophia as a mosque in 2020. This decree not only reversed the Atatürk-era decision to turn the building into a museum but functions as a broadside against the very principle of secularism. Similarly, public commemorations of the past emphasize events such as Mehmet Fatih's conquest of Istanbul or the Seljuk victory over the Byzantines at Manzikert whereas "holidays that relate to the Republic are devalued or outright cancelled" (Uzer, 2018, p. 354). The attempt to reshape public attitudes to the Ottoman past also finds expression in popular television series. In addition to the Ottoman glory years of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, these also depict Sultan Abdulhamid whose rule in the early twentieth century used to be demonized as a time of backwardness and decay (Frahm & Lehmkuhl, 2021, p. 530).

Economic Populism

Conservative social values and an anti-secular stance are, however, not the only cleavage in the AKP's discursive division of Turkish society into the genuine people and the rest. The second dividing line are Turkey's stark socio-economic divisions (Yabancı, 2016). As Turkey experienced rapid urbanization throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the major cities headlined by the megalopolis Istanbul are inhabited by millions of migrants from villages and small towns (*kasaba*). These migrants tend to be poor and precarious since many built their homes illegally on public lands in so-called *gecekondu*. Having himself grown up in Kasimpaşa, a working-class district in central Istanbul, Erdoğan credibly presented the AKP as the party of the economically disadvantaged city-dwellers (Çinar & Sayin, 2014, p. 374). Many of the projects of urban renewal which enabled families to become first-time homeowners, as well as improved access to free health care were aimed at improving the lot of this core electorate that was not necessarily seduced by cultural populism (Özel & Yıldırım, 2019). In turn, many lower-class Turks built a strong emotional connection to Erdoğan and the AKP and believe "they would continue to get aid only if AKP stays in power" (Özdemir, 2020, p. 256). Less openly, economic policy was also marked by a redistribution of capital and wealth to AKP cronies.

Whereas Turkey outperformed the EU and the U.S. in the decade from 2008 to 2018—fuelled by debt-financed construction and consumer spending—its economy has done considerably worse ever since. During that time, the AKP has gone from embracing a neoliberal agenda with Turkey deeply embedded into the global political economy to a return to interventionist state-capitalism and deficit spending (Öniş, 2019, pp. 214–15). The most visible sign of the deteriorating macroeconomic climate is the dramatic devaluation of the Turkish Lira which has gone from a rate of 1:6 to the Euro in 2019 to 1:30 in 2023. Instead of raising interest rates to combat the currency crisis, the AKP government rails against economic orthodoxy. In fact, President Erdoğan himself propagates an entirely new form of economics bent on the notion that high interest rates not only stifle growth but also increase inflation (Ant & Yilmaz, 2022). The most prominent element of what *The Economist* termed 'Erdoganomics' has been to force the Central Bank to stick to a regime of low interest rates to boost economic growth. As a result, the once-considerable foreign currency reserves have been depleted which in turn led to further depreciation

of the Lira. This devaluation is compounded by skyrocketing inflation valued at between 83% (Turkish Statistical Institute) and 176% (independent panel) in September 2022. Two-thirds of the population are struggling to pay for rent and food and the crisis thus directly affects the living standards of the AKP's core electorate (Askew, 2022). Altogether, there are three core constitutive elements of the AKP's contemporary economic populism: (1) debt-financed policies to maintain the loyalty of specific groups of voters; (2) macroeconomic policies that run against economic orthodoxy; and (3) blaming the economic crisis on unnamed external powers that are trying to bring down Turkey (Zengin & Ongur, 2020, p. 583).

Foreign Policy Populism

In contrast to cultural and economic populism that had been key features of the AKP's programme and campaigning going back to its previous iteration as Refah/Welfare Party in the mid-1990s, a populist foreign policy only entered into the equation during the 2010s. After the initial ambition to join the European Union had run aground, the former Foreign and later Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu strove for a role of regional leadership with the goal of propelling Turkey into a front row seat at the table of global governance (Aras & Gorener, 2010). The special emphasis on rediscovering the territories of the former Ottoman Empire, from the Balkans and Caucasus to the Middle East and North Africa, which was in line with the cultural rehabilitation of the Ottoman heritage at home, in the 2010s increasingly added an element of foreign policy populism (Frahm & Lehmkuhl, 2021, p. 530). On the one hand, the AKP justified Turkey's claim to becoming a regional power on account of the supposition that Turkey represented the interests and acted as the spokesperson for (Sunni) Muslim countries that on their own did not have sufficient clout to be taken seriously by the international community (Taş, 2022, p. 135). Hence, after winning presidential elections in 2014, President Erdoğan used the victory speech to declare that "not just Turkey, but Kabul, Beirut, Damascus, Aleppo, Skopje, Ramallah, Jericho, Gaza and Jerusalem have also won" (Sözcü 2014). As foreign policy decision-making increasingly moved from the Foreign Office to the Presidency (Kaliber & Kaliber, 2019, p. 8), this was accompanied by a populist critique of the international system which is allegedly rigged against the interests of Turkey and the neo-Ottoman sphere. Emblematic is the oft-repeated phrase that "the world is bigger than five", referring to the five permanent

members of the UN Security Council. In 2021, President Erdoğan even penned a book, “A Fairer World is Possible”, on how to reform the UN system. Anti-Western rhetoric in foreign policy statements has meanwhile multiplied since the Gezi Park protests, alleged to be the work of a cabal of national and international foes, and especially since the coup attempt in 2016 (Destradi et al. in this volume). Pronouncements like the government’s threat to join the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation play on widespread prejudices against the U.S., UK and others that date as far back as the late Ottoman period (Göksel, 2019; Taş, 2022).

Immigration Versus Populism

One final policy area that effectively bridges all three areas of cultural, economic and foreign policy populism is the Turkish government’s approach to migration. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, an estimated 3.65 million Syrians have fled to Turkey, rendering the country into the world’s largest host of refugee populations. Allowing refugees to enter Turkish territory for humanitarian reasons and out of religious solidarity contrasted markedly with the fortification of borders practised by most European countries; a contrast that AKP politicians remarked on time and again to point out Turkey’s moral superiority and criticize Europe’s anti-Muslim racism (Polat, 2018, pp. 507–510). As the economic crisis began to bite, the generosity towards Syrian refugees who enjoy free access to health care while competing with working-class Turks for jobs and housing has led to widespread animosity towards (Arab) refugees (Aydın et al., 2023, pp. 101–105). While the newly-formed explicitly anti-immigrant Zafer Partisi only has a fringe following (Lange, 2021), anti-immigrant sentiment can be found in the programmes and rhetoric of most opposition parties (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019, p. 42). In 2022, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the largest opposition party, appeared on posters with the message: “Hey world, Turkey will not be your refugee camp” (SonDakika, 2022). The government itself has shown a mixed response. There have been a growing number of raids to detect illegal migrants. The Turkish occupation of Afrin in Northern Syria in 2018, though primarily meant to weaken Syria’s Kurdish groups, has occasionally been framed as creating a safe zone to which up to a million Syrians could be resettled (Chulov, 2022). On the other hand, the political rhetoric has remained largely unchanged. Showing the pertinence of

neo-Ottoman thinking, Turkey's minister of the interior defended the Syrians' presence by referring to their shared Ottoman heritage (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019, p. 38) and President Erdoğan stressed that Turkey would always welcome refugees and categorically ruled out forcing them to return to Syria (BBC News Türkçe, 2022).

A CLASH OF POPULISMS—THE EVOLUTION OF TURKISH POPULISM IN CRISIS

During its two decades in power, the AKP has had to “explore its dexterity in manufacturing new enemies” (Taş, 2022, p. 129) but has consistently adhered to the use of populist tropes. What stands out about the contemporary moment is that these tropes are no longer reaping the same rewards in popularity. In turn, the AKP government has changed course in several areas. Arguably the most dramatic shifts have occurred in economic policy. Over the past five years, the government has moved away from neoliberal economic principles and an open economy which marked the bedrock of Turkish economic success in the 2000s and early 2010s. Instead, we see the promulgation of an idiosyncratic economic model without scientific basis and precedent. This model is in fact promoted along the populist template not only as a deliberate rejection of arrogant yet ignorant academic elites but also—yet another novelty—because a low-interest regime is in keeping with Islamic values (Yeni Akit, 2021). In foreign policy, the Turkish government exhibits a reorientation from risk aversion towards unpredictability with a penchant for unilateral initiatives. These include engagement in protracted conflicts such as Syria and Libya and threats to attack Greece. Crucially, these actions are conducted with minimal consultation with Turkey's allies. As the international system is presented as tilted in favour of the great powers, Turkey is supposedly compelled to go it alone.

Despite these substantial changes in approaches to economic and foreign policy, there are other core areas of populist policies that have remained unchanged throughout the crisis. The reason for this remarkable level of persistence in the face of declining popularity is, we argue, the fact that these areas denote not only the core of the AKP's message but also of the party's and its leaders' core ideological belief system. Thus, in the realm of foreign policy, the Turkish government has persisted in its strategy to establish Turkey as a regional power and representative of the powerless and voiceless in international affairs. This was on display during the war between

Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020 and during the ongoing war in Ukraine where in both cases Ankara unsuccessfully sought to play the role of mediator and peacemaker. Likewise, the AKP government has not budged in the pursuit of cultural populism as it maintains a clear posture in the self-declared culture war to defend Turkish societal values against what they consider to be the wrong kind of modernization and liberalization. What has also by and large stayed the same is the Turkish government's openness to host refugees, despite widespread opposition to their continued presence in the country. In fact, this persistence openly defies Turkish opposition parties' populist narratives that decry the fact that during a severe economic crisis the government supports Arab refugees instead of its own people (Aydemir, 2022, p. 12). It is an open question to what extent the Turkish government will finally change course after the devastating earthquake in February 2023 as resentment towards Syrian refugees continues to rise and has spilled over into sporadic acts of violence (Dawi, 2023).

The More They Change, the More They Stay the Same

It is notoriously difficult to establish the exact causal mechanisms of political decision-making and that is certainly the case for a populist party like the AKP which is not known for transparency. Allowing for some level of conjecture, it is however possible to point to some factors that contributed to the decision to discard some policies while holding onto others. Thus, one factor is arguably the clear trend towards personalization and centralization of decision-making (Aytaç & Elçi, 2019). With strategy discussions limited to the populist leader and a small clique of advisors (Yardımcı-Geyikçi & Yavuzylmaz, 2022), there are fewer challenges to populist dogma than in an emerging populist movement where unpopular policy offerings might provoke more vocal internal dissent. Therefore, it is hardly a coincidence that AKP flagship policies such as zero-problems-with-the-neighbourhood or the vision of Turkey as a neoliberal trading state were readily abandoned given that their main proponents—former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and former Minister of the Economy Ali Babacan respectively—have since left the party. Conversely, it does seem reasonable to suspect that the policy areas that were left untouched as the AKP's fortunes declined are those especially important to the party leadership. By all accounts, creating a more socially conservative society and being seen as the safeguard against an alleged Western cultural crusade are both policies very dear to the AKP ruling circle (Roche, 2021). It

is instructive that one of the first things President Erdoğan mentioned in his victory speech in May 2023 was his opposition to LGBT rights. This may in part explain the government's choice to stick to unpopular policies such as generosity towards Syrian refugees or the abrogation of the Istanbul Convention.

CONCLUSIONS: DECLINING POPULISTS THROUGH THICK AND THIN

This analysis of how populist discourses evolved in Turkey adds empirical weight to the claim that there is a certain thickness in populists' ideology. This in turn may explain why populist parties in decline stick to their approaches even when the impact on popularity diminishes. From the Turkish case, it appears that as a populist government's fortunes decline, its core beliefs come to the fore by way of exclusion. Whereas most unpopular policies are readily discarded such as Turkey's policy of zero problems with the neighbourhood, other policies such as a crusade against opponents of the AKP's cultural conservatism are held onto even when they may cost votes. It is especially striking that a government otherwise bent on framing its policies in a populist template would hold onto a deeply unpopular policy such as a comparatively generous regime of hosting millions of Syrian refugees. This indicates that these policies are essential to the populists' ideology and constitute their core beliefs.

While it is beyond the scope of this contribution to determine the exact reasons for why these particular policies constitute the populists' core beliefs, there are strong hints that the personalization of rule and specific personal preferences prevalent among the AKP leadership play a decisive role. Moreover, to put the claim that many populist parties possess a thick ideological underbelly on a firmer empirical footing, we will need to expand the analysis to other cases of populists who have been or continue to be in power such as Poland or Venezuela, India or Italy. It will be instructive, for example, if the populist Make America Great coalition in the U.S. holds onto its strict opposition to abortion rights even as this proves highly unpopular among the general electorate. Our preliminary finding from the case of Turkey's AKP suggests that populists may indeed be thicker ideologically than they have been given credit for.

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The End of the World Is Always Better in Theory: The Strained Relationship Between Populist Radical Right Parties and the State-of-Crisis Narrative

Markus Ketola and Pontus Odmalm

INTRODUCTION

Scholars identify two key developments, which help to explain the sustained success of the PRR. These may appear contradictory and counter intuitive, but also correspond to the chameleon-like nature of this party family (Mudde, 2007). On the one hand, the PRR sought to tone down its reputation as a single-issue party. The PRR diversified its issue agenda aiming to become just like ‘any other party’ driven by ideology and long-term visions rather than short-term policy-seeking objectives. These changes in image and discourse are labelled as *mainstreaming* in the literature (see e.g., Ashe et al., 2021; Abdou-Chadi & Krause, 2020;

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Abdou-Chadi et al., 2021; Akkerman et al., 2016). This process involves, amongst other things, replacing the biological racism of yesterday with theories of ethno-pluralism. The contemporary PRR rarely talks about immigration as threatening the purity of the population stock. Instead, it recognises the unique character of all *ethnic* groups but settlement across borders dilutes these distinct identities with the result of certain ethnicities disappearing over time (Boréus, 2020; Bjånesøy & Ivarsflaten, 2016; Rydgren, 2005).

On the other hand, the idea of the state as structured around legitimate—and illegitimate—claims is very much alive (de Cleen et al., 2020). Accordingly, various forms of chauvinism crystallised as the PRR reinvented itself as a serious and trustworthy challenger. Simultaneously, however, narratives alluding to the “state of crisis” and the role of the PRR as “saviour of the nation” have remained intact and are important reminders of its populist *and* Nationalist heritage. The view of society as divided into two groups—namely, the pure people and the corrupt elite—is thus fundamental to the PRR and its reason for existence. However, the definition of *who* this elite is has changed over time. This is a natural form of evolution perhaps since several PRR parties have become institutionalised in their respective party systems and therefore (theoretically at least) are part of the elite. These changes present novel challenges to the PRR but also open up new opportunities. To remain a credible *populist* challenger, the PRR depends on a variety of disaster narratives, which all tap into the imminent collapse of society. Linking immigration to said collapse—and then blaming it on the corrupt mainstream elite—has been a fruitful strategy since at least the early 2000s. Yet given the process of policy accommodation, which followed the migrant crisis of 2015 in particular, the stances of most mainstream parties are now increasingly difficult to distinguish from the PRR.

It has therefore been challenging to push the line that all mainstream parties face in the same direction, and the PRR has had to look elsewhere for a corrupt elite to go up against. The EU politics of immigration consequently became more important again. In addition to the corrupt elite at home, the contemporary PRR is just as likely to blame ‘the unelected bureaucrats in Brussels’ for the never-ending flow of migrants. Said bureaucrats undermine the sovereignty of the (pure) nation-state when forcing it to burden-share the responsibilities of hosting asylum-seekers. By the same token, the disaster narrative that membership-in-supranational-bodies-erodes-national-sovereignty has also been applied to military

alliances. As the pros and cons of NATO membership moved up on political agendas in early 2022, it became increasingly challenging for the PRR to apply the same type of populist logic to NATO as had previously been done to the EU.

We explore the above developments and look specifically at the deviant cases of the PS and SD (see Jungar & Jupskås, 2014). Both parties journeyed towards the PRR ‘family’ over time but also have very different starting points. The history of the PS traces back to the 1950s the agrarian populism of the Finnish Rural Party (SMP) and the rural-urban divide that emerged in the post-war era. Like other populist parties at the time, SMP struggled with internal cohesion and also lacked a clear guiding principle. Its metamorphosis into the PS by the mid-1990s meant the party became more obviously part of the PRR party family. Issues of nationalism and sovereignty developed into important questions therefore. These changes culminated in the 2010s when (further) cutting the levels of immigration, exiting the EU and refusing to join NATO topped the electoral pledges of the PS (PS, 2011). The SD, on the other hand, stem from the Swedish white power movement of the 1980s. The party has actively tried to downplay its neo-Nazi past ever since Jimmy Akeson took over as party leader in 2005. What the PS and the SD share, however, is the idea that the party leader also represents the party rather than the other way around. This view marks them out in comparative perspective where party leaders also tend to be the party. Accordingly, the ‘state of crisis’ their respective countries are in and the roles played by the PS and SD as ‘saviours of the nation’ also differ. In that sense, the two parties correspond to, or least acknowledge the Nordic model of collectivist interest representation, which political parties embody.

The chapter proceeds as follows. We first lay out some of the key differences between the PS and SD relative to other PRR parties in Western Europe. This leads up to a discussion of why their understanding of the corrupt elite has changed over time and what these shifts mean for the type of discourses and styles of communication that PRR parties adopt. Finally, we reflect on the relevance of our findings and whether or not we are likely to see a return to ‘populism as usual’ in the foreseeable future.

THE FINNS PARTY

The agrarian populist roots of the Finns Party (*Perussuomalaiset*—PS) also make it an outlier of the PRR family in a European context. The party was built on the political traditions of the Finnish Rural Party (*Suomen Maaseudun Puolue*, *SMP*), an early example of a populist party representing the ‘forgotten people’ of rural Finland. The party relied heavily on the political vision of its founder, Veikko Vennamo. Prior to entering politics, Vennamo was tasked with coordinating the rehousing of war evacuees from Karelia and it was his dismay at the treatment of these evacuees that led him to represent their interests, although by the early 1980s the scope had expanded to include also the interests of all poor and rural communities (Enävaara, 1979). The SMP was staunchly anti-elitist, and Vennamo was driven by a desire to break free from the consensus-driven culture, which characterised the Finnish party system as well as to challenge the Soviet pandering self-censorship of the mainstream parties.

The populist legacy of the SMP has been a direct influence on the PS. This is no coincidence since the PS was established, following the bankruptcy of the SMP in 1995, by political actors who all had been significant players in the SMP. Timo Soini, the founder and long-time leader of the PS was, for example, the SMP’s party secretary and often spoke of his debt to Vennamo and the SMP in the shaping of his politics. He even described himself as ‘vennamite’ (*vennamolainen*) and saw the PS as a direct continuation of the SMP. Raimo Vistbacka, the first leader of the PS (1995–1997) and Urpo Leppänen, its party secretary, both had long careers as MPs and ministers for the SMP. Unsurprisingly, then, the PS policy priorities gravitated towards those particular goals, which were closely aligned with the SMP’s style of populism, such as protecting the interests of the ‘forgotten’ urban and rural poor, and standing up to the political and cultural elite in Helsinki. The first party programme from 1995 is a good example of the PS communicating its populist world view first and foremost—‘the aim of the party is to bring together ... those sections of the population whose interests ... are not fairly safeguarded//...// nobody should be without welfare—which is why we demand a new, fairer redistribution’ (*Perussuomalaiset*, 1995). The PS thus situated its rhetoric on the side of the ‘little people’ who had predominantly been the losers of globalisation. Moreover, the party drew on so-called heartland values of ‘family, religion, honesty, hard work, supporting small businesses, resisting corruption and bureaucracy’ all the while challenging the power of the

political and cultural elite in Helsinki (Soini, 2020, p. 10). The issue of immigration, conversely, and the role of the external other, which were central to PRR parties elsewhere, played a relatively minor role in describing the state of crisis that Finland and its population were struggling against.

Despite raising its own brand of multi-issue populism coupled with Euroscepticism, the broader membership base of the PS also featured a vocal and increasingly well-organised and influential group of anti-immigration activists. Accordingly, the migrant other became the new external “other” and started to play an implicit, albeit growing, role in the PS. The most well-known figure among the anti-immigrant faction was Jussi Halla-aho, a controversial politician with outspoken views on immigration and integration, which he shared on his popular blog, *Scripta*. In 2011, the PS suspended him from the parliamentary group and in 2012, the Supreme Court found him guilty of disturbing religious worship, fining him €400 for arguing in his blog that the prophet Muhammad was a paedophile. However, already in the run-up to the 2011 parliamentary elections Halla-aho, together with other immigration-critical party colleagues, published their own ‘Dour Manifesto’ (*Nuiva Manifesti*), which came to dominate the media headlines. The document focused solely on the ‘failures of multiculturalism’ and the state of crisis Finland was in following the political mainstream’s policies which resulted in ‘uncontrolled immigration’. The manifesto stressed the outcomes would be fatal for Finland and referred to immigration as ‘the shameless exploitation of Finnish innocence’ (Perussuomalaiset, 2010). While Soini’s instinct was to try and contain the issue of immigration within the party (Soini, 2014), it nevertheless became the defining question in the subsequent leadership contest following his resignation in 2017. Indeed, the new leader, Jussi Halla-aho, undertook a purposeful reform of the party machinery to purge it of the old-school, SMP-type populism and rebuild it as a new, single-issue party around the questions of immigration and integration. In this ‘new’ narrative, multiculturalism and the poorly thought-through immigration policies of the political mainstream were to blame for virtually all of Finland’s social, economic, and cultural problems. In relation to welfare policy, for example, the 2015 programme (written under Soini’s leadership) referred to immigration nineteen times over fifteen pages, whereas the equivalent programme in 2019 (the first under Halla-aho’s leadership) made seventy-one references to it across fourteen pages (Perussuomalaiset, 2015, 2019). In the Halla-aho era, then, the state of crisis narrative and

the external other were actively and deliberately synthesised into a single and cohesive narrative about the threat of immigration and the imminent collapse of, especially, the Finnish (welfare) state (Ketola and Nordensvard, 2022).

THE SWEDEN DEMOCRATS

The trajectory of the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*—SD) differs from other PRR parties in Western Europe (see Bolin, 2015). Rather than gravitating towards restrictive and assimilationist positions, the party is very much rooted in the anti-immigration, ethno-nationalist, and chauvinist tradition (Widfeldt, 2008). The origins of the SD trace back to the 1970s and to the white Nationalist and racist movement Keep Sweden Swedish (*Bevara Sverige Svenskt*—BSS). The movement consisted of various loosely formalised organisations who drew inspiration from the pro-Nazi, New Swedish Movement (*Nysvenska Rörelsen*—NsR) of the 1940s, and the neo-Nazi, Nordic Realm Party (*Nordiska Rikspartiet*—NRP) of the post-war era. BSS eventually stabilised and changed its name to the Sweden Party (*Sverigepartiet*—SvP) following a merger in 1986 with the Progress Party (*Framstegspartiet*—FsP), a low-tax-cum-anti-immigration--type populist party.

In 1988, then, the SD was formed. Its first chairman, Anders Klarström, had been active in NRP and was replaced by Mikael Jansson in 1995. This change in leadership meant the reinvention of the SD began in earnest. The party sought to break with its extremist past and subsequently banned uniforms, expelled ‘problematic’ members, and, particularly, changed its discourses around asylum and immigration. ‘Essential biological traits’ and ‘racial hierarchies’ were thus replaced by ‘ethno-pluralism’ and ‘assimilation’ (Güler, 2019). These changes in framing meant immigration was problematised along a new axis of conflict, namely, as an economic *and* Nationalist crisis, instigated by the corrupt mainstream elite.

When Jimmie Åkesson assumed party leadership in 2005, the latent populist streaks were crystallised in both rhetoric and policy formulation, but the efforts to normalise the SD also intensified. The (negative) impact of immigration underwent a two-fold process of mainstreaming, further tallying with the SD becoming a *populist* radical right party. On the one hand, the party emphasised all ethnic groups were of equal standing and, crucially, that their survival—as distinct entities—had to be safeguarded. Its reductionist position on immigration was now qualified as a way to

preserve ‘the nation’ *as well as* various ethnic groups elsewhere (see Brown et al., 2021). By limiting immigration to a bare minimum and demanding assimilation, the argument ran, the survival of different ethnicities would be guaranteed. On the other hand, the SD changed its approach to the Swedish (welfare) state. The party argued it was the result of the hard work and sacrifices made by earlier generations. These efforts should be acknowledged therefore by prioritising *their* needs and *their* access to properly funded welfare. However, the social contract and the idea of the ‘people’s home’ had been betrayed by the corrupt mainstream elite, who ranked the well-being of non-assimilable migrants over the deserving—and pure—Swedish population (Tyrberg & Dahlström, 2018). The party’s critical view of the ‘granny state’ was thus replaced by a narrative focusing on the unique character of ‘the people’s home’ (*Folkhemmet*). The ethno-Nationalist thinking of the past was thereby blended with contemporary ideas of welfare and labour market chauvinism (Malmqvist, 2019).

Moreover, these discursive shifts teed up the ‘state of crisis’ and ‘saviour’ narratives which followed (Teitelbaum, 2019). The Swedish welfare state was thus on the brink of a systemic collapse because of the political mainstream’s lax approach to border control and the resources it had spent on an undeserving migrant population. The emphasis on fairness, stability, and the integrity of the welfare state echoed some of the qualifiers that the centre-left parties, in particular, put forward to restrict labour migration in the 1970s and asylum and refugee flows in the 1980s. An important aspect of the welfare-state-in-crisis narrative was the threat that ‘uncontrolled immigration’ posed to these ‘sacred’ national institutions. At the same time, the SD warned that immigration, especially from geographically distant cultures, would also erode national identity and that natural sense of cultural attachment the Swedish population *had* felt towards one another. By invoking a sense of nostalgia—for a quality of life that had gone astray in the age of migration—the party was able to allude to a mythological golden age of the past.

THE EMERGENCE (AND SURPRISING PERSISTENCE) OF A ‘NEW’ CORRUPT ELITE

Euroscepticism was conversely a much more salient issue for the PS, and the EU was cast as the key external villain that challenged Finnish sovereignty. The issue of the EU was arguably *the* single issue which slingshot

the party into mainstream politics by the 2011 parliamentary elections. As a Eurozone country, the aftermath of the financial crisis, and especially the bailout of the Greek economy, became heated topics in the election debates. The PS therefore placed the main thrust of its communication strategies on the threats posed to Finnish sovereignty and self-determination by being a member of the EU. It was during the 2011 election campaign that Soini coined his best-known phrase, namely, “Where you find the EU, you will also find a problem” (*Missä EU, siellä ongelma*). In particular, the EU’s handling of the economic crisis was framed as a demonstration of how political elites consistently failed to protect the *national* interests of the ‘common man’ in Finland, and instead prioritised their own interests of multiculturalism and Europeanness (Nordensvard & Ketola, 2015). However, the PS pushed a relatively benign and reformist style of Euroscepticism. It thus recognised the benefits of the single market but also doubted the purpose of a deeper political union and the impact it would have on national sovereignty, in particular. In the Finnish context, therefore, where the main focus previously had been to explain the overwhelming absence of Euroscepticism (Raunio, 2005), the success of the *Eurohesitant* message of the PS in the 2011 parliamentary elections was nothing short of earth shattering.

That said, the PS’ approach to the European Union contrasts significantly with its position on NATO. The Russia-sceptic worldview of the party, especially on questions regarding national and international security, meant the PS leant towards a positive understanding of NATO as an institution as well as towards a prospective Finnish membership of NATO. Vennamo, as the leader of the SMP, was in favour of Finland joining NATO. Soini on the other hand never explicitly supported NATO membership, and the formal position of PS was to oppose membership on the grounds that good economic, political, and security relations with Russia were the main political concerns of Finland and in its best interests, and that these relationships with Russia would be compromised by any formal calls for NATO membership (Soini, 2014, loc. 3299). Yet, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Soini supported the process of inscribing the NATO option to the programme for government, which marked a significant watershed with previous governments who opposed such public statements of intent and points towards a degree of ambivalence in relation to the party’s position on NATO (Soini, 2019).

Halla-aho’s position, on the other hand, had always been more clearly in favour of NATO, and he approached the threat posed by Russia from

the perspective of a Finnish nationalist. For Halla-aho, Russia represented an existential threat to the Finnish nation. Moreover, Russians were said to suffer from a ‘Great Power Complex’ and were fuelled by a messianic understanding of Russia as the heir of the Roman Empire (Halla-aho 2022). Halla-aho had studied both the Ukrainian and Russian languages, and during his time at university, he also spent a year in Ukraine working in the Finnish embassy—his interest in the on-going war in Ukraine should come as no surprise. In February 2022, just prior to his selection as the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, he published a highly critical statement on Russia’s actions, and argued that there was no hope left for diplomacy since Putin was motivated purely by hegemonic aspirations. Halla-aho argued that since nobody threatened Russia militarily, it was nonsensical to demand that her neighbours imposed limits on their foreign- and security policies as well as framing it as an issue of Russian security. Moreover, this context would render any negotiations pointless, Halla-aho claimed, and even went as far as drawing a parallel between Russian actions in Ukraine and those of Nazi Germany in Czechoslovakia in 1938.

Following the invasion of Ukraine, the PS has been supportive of the Finnish government’s response to the war, including the acceptance of thousands of Ukrainian refugees. However, according to the current party leader, Riikka Purra, the Finnish government also needs to acknowledge that there are limited resources available to support any more asylum-seekers coming to Finland, and as a result should reset its annual refugee quota to zero (Helsingin Sanomat, 2022). Halla-aho has in turn compared Ukrainian and Middle Eastern refugees, arguing that those fleeing Ukraine were women and children ‘clutching teddy bears’, and not ‘body-building brats who say they are 17 years old but can’t prove it’ (Itälehti, 2022). The extent to which migrants and refugees represented a source of crisis was therefore conditioned by the extent to which they shared cultural proximity—both geographically and historically—with Finland. The new *Foreign and Security Programme* also reflects these somewhat conflicted sentiments, at the same time offering strong support for NATO membership while justifying this as an opportunity to align its EU policies with the other Nordic NATO members who subscribe to a more EU-sceptic approach (Perussuomalaiset, 2022). The same document makes the case for stopping humanitarian immigration altogether, because of its negative impact on the will to support national defence (*maanpuolustustahto*) and conscription.

THE EMERGENCE (AND RAPID DECLINE) OF A ‘NEW’ CORRUPT ELITE

The issues of EU and NATO membership managed to remain non-salient to the SD for a remarkably long period of time (Lidström, 2020; Ydén et al., 2019). Their lack of importance partly explained by the victorious ‘Yes to the EU’-side in the 1994 referendum, and, in part, by the well-entrenched consensus regarding neutrality, which characterised the Swedish party system since the post-war era. Although the SD was critical, and at times even hostile, to the idea that the ‘nation’ could be part of any form of supranational project, the party also appreciated that emphasising and then campaigning on a “Swexit” ticket would not resonate in the same way with its core supporters as immigration (Hix & Sitter, 2018). Together with the reformed Left Party (*Vänsterpartiet*—V), the SD were the sole (explicitly) Eurosceptic parties in Swedish politics. Yet the Nationalist foundations of the SD also provided an ideological steer to its anti-EU stance. Accordingly, the EU was a threat to self-governance *as well as* to the survival of the nation as a distinct entity. The SD was especially sceptical about on-going processes of Europeanisation and the uploading of domestic competencies to the EU level (Dijkstra et al., 2020). By the time of the 2015 ‘migrant crisis’, and as the Swedish reception strategy turned from ‘welcoming’ to ‘restrictive’, the issue of EU membership once again became salient to the SD (Hagelund, 2020). Since attempts to burden-share asylum applications had not panned out as expected, the EU politics of migration served as a populist opening and created a ‘new’ type of corrupt elite that that SD could go up against. The ‘state of crisis’ waiting on the doorstep was not only the fault of the corrupt domestic elite but also of the equally corrupt and unaccountable elite down in Brussels. The party was quick to point out, therefore, that neither national nor supranational representatives had the pure *Swedish* people in mind when engaging with the unprecedented flow of asylum-seekers.

It is likely the link between ‘immigration’ and ‘the EU’ would have paid off in the long-run had the War in Ukraine not thrown this strategy out the window. The decision by Putin to invade a sovereign state in February 2022 created a minor ideological crisis for the SD. Its policy aims of ethno-pluralism together with the party’s natural inclination to side with authoritarian and Nationalist leaders (Teitelbaum, 2019) meant the SD struggled at first to condemn the Russian invasion. While the party strongly opposed the Swedish government’s approach to asylum-seekers

back in 2015, the SD was quick to show support for Ukrainians fleeing the war. The difference was, Jimmie Akesson, argued, that Ukraine and Sweden shared a Judeo-Christian *and* culturally European heritage. Although the stance towards these ‘real refugees’ tallied with the SD reinventing itself as a nationalist, ethno-pluralist and socially conservative party, it also echoed the xenophobic and racist foundations of the party (Åberg, 2019).

The SD consequently had to perform a delicate balancing act as to how it applied and communicated populist discourses. Another difference was that Ukraine was located within the same geographical sphere as Sweden and it made sense therefore to offer sanctuary to these *co-ethnics*. The SD argued further this position was in line with its overall view regarding the best way to deal with asylum-seekers and refugees. The party referenced its long-standing view that neighbouring states, particularly in the Middle East, were the most appropriate to host (Muslim) asylum-seekers. The war in Ukraine allowed the party to reemphasise its thesis about ‘first-safe-countries’ and to question the rationale for why asylum-seekers from, say, Iraq or Afghanistan, decided to journey through multiple safe states before reaching Sweden. Yet at the same time, the party also had long established links and working relationships with the Kremlin and previously not condemned the Russian approach to, for example, LGBT+ issues, democratic rights and freedoms, and the sphere-of-influence type rhetoric which characterised the annexation of Crimea.

CONCLUSION

The PRR relies heavily on ‘state of crisis’ and ‘saviour’-style narratives for its political communication strategies. But they also can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they are effective tools for mobilising electoral support and framing the current and future social ills. And they are particularly fruitful when tagged onto the issue of immigration and the imminent collapse of the welfare state (Ketola & Nordensvard, 2018). Yet narratives of forthcoming doom, somewhat paradoxically, also rely on a context of ‘politics as usual’. The war in Ukraine made it challenging for the PS and SD to push long-established arguments about the ‘end of the world’ as a result of uncontrolled immigration and the actions of a corrupt mainstream elite. Instead, the parties struggled to utilise the crisis narrative of “war” for the benefit of their own political agendas.

The EU politics of immigration previously allowed both parties to construct a narrative where the people *and* the nation were subject to an unaccountable elite in Brussels. This elite had not engaged sufficiently with the migrant crisis in 2015 and the situation was further exacerbated by policies that ‘flooded’ many EU countries—and especially Sweden—with more asylum-seekers and refugees. The question of NATO membership, conversely, became a salient issue virtually overnight due to the war in Ukraine. The changing geo-political landscape made it challenging for the SD to come up with a response to the invasion. The party had been implicitly sceptical to join yet *another* organisation that threatened national sovereignty. It feared a further erosion of self-determination as well as a risk of military engagement in countries irrelevant to the survival of Sweden as a nation. As a middle way, then, the SD suggested a wait-and-see approach. Becoming a member of NATO *could* be considered should Finland also decide to join. In Finland, the realpolitik of Russia’s geographic proximity meant the NATO question had always been a salient issue and one that afforded little, if any, room for constructing a crisis narrative.

The war in Ukraine likely challenges the *populist* aspect of the PRR, in particular, the scope available to raise its core concerns of immigration, integration, and nationalism, and, more importantly perhaps, of where to allocate the blame. The ‘saviour’ narratives of both parties depend very much on a stable—and predictable—world stage where asylum and migration crises originate in geographically distant locations. These contextual changes pose a series of challenges to the Nordic contingent of the PRR, but potentially also elsewhere in Europe. The PS and SD sought to deal with these shifts by targeting a ‘new’ type of corrupt elite, which was located at a level above the nation state. At the same time, they tried to keep key messages intact, namely, that the nation and its institutions were on the verge of a systemic breakdown because of long-term failures by Swedish and Finnish mainstream parties to retain national sovereignty and control national borders.

Yet the PS and SD also appear at a loss. As the narratives of a ‘state of crisis’ went from theory to practice, their well-rehearsed phrases of who was to blame also became difficult to apply. It seems reasonable to conclude therefore that PRR parties will strive on the *idea* of a ‘state of crisis’. However, they are likely to struggle to capitalise on it once the crisis becomes reality and they are forced to take responsibility and make difficult decisions. Moreover, our discussion demonstrated that populist

disaster narratives are typically (more) successful when they focus on contested forms of crises, which also are the workings of ‘the enemy within’ (be that domestic or supranational ones). Threats which, conversely, are external, concrete, and uncontested tend to offer less traction and are subsequently abandoned.

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Saying the Unspeakable: Populism, Performance and the Politics of Covid-19

Amy Skonieczny and Giorgio Davide Boggio

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we argue that Trump's populist grandstanding on a world stage is representative of chauvinistic populism—a particularly divisive, exclusive and 'bad-mannered' transgressive populism that produced a particularly cruel, indifferent and incompetent response to the Covid-19 pandemic. President Trump was not alone in his style of response. We compare President Trump's chauvinistic populist response to Covid-19 to two other chauvinistic populist leaders, Prime Minister Modi in India and President Bolsonaro in Brazil, to show that rather than adapt previously egregious populist rhetoric to a more appropriate response for a world-wide health crisis, chauvinistic populists proceeded to double-down on their transgressive, norm-breaking discursive style.

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In the following sections, we define chauvinistic populism as a particular performance and style of transgressive populism (see Aiolfi, 2022). We draw on public speeches, media reports and secondary literature to examine the populist responses of three chauvinistic populist leaders, President Trump, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, and develop a framework for explaining the consistency and pattern of their responses to the pandemic. In line with current research (Cepaluni et al., 2022; Charron et al., 2022), we find that the pandemic responses of chauvinistic populists not only hindered the public health response and increased the number of cases of Covid-19, hospitalizations and even deaths in their respective countries, but also made the most basic and scientifically proven health mitigation policies divisive, ideological and cruel.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, PERFORMANCE AND POPULISM

Like most of the contributors in this volume, we share a set of analytical anchors that defines populism. The main core features of populism are: (1) reference to a pure and true people (2) pitting the people in a battle against the "corrupt" elite and (3) an identification of an out-group (Mudde, 2004). In addition, Sørensen (2021) adds that right-wing populists in particular use disruption to signal outsider status. This disruption could be in the way they talk (bad-manners) (Moffitt, 2016) or in their willingness to break with convention and norms (Bucy et al., 2020). As the editors state in the introduction, populists amplify particular narratives, symbols, and myths that serve their electoral goals by drawing on emotions such as nostalgia for the past (Lacatus et al., Chap. 1, this volume).

Recently, political communication scholars have entered the debates on populism focusing on how communication processes construct both the content of populism as well as the form of delivery and style of speech (de Vreese et al., 2018). As Lacatus, Meibauer and Löffmann point out in the introduction to this volume, communication is the "rocket fuel" of populist politics (Sørensen, 2021) and populists claim to 'speak' for the unrepresented, ignored, or unheard voices of the people. Communication and what is communicated through style, tone, and medium matter just as much if not more than content. With a focus on populist communication, many of the false divides in the populism literature can be bridged, as "the dichotomy between ideology and style that has dominated the definitional debate is unjustified" (Sørensen, 2021, p. 49–50). Thus, approaching

populism as a form of political communication rather than a content of political ideology brings together several distinct strains of the populist literature into one communicative expression.

While commonality in populist leaders' discourse and style have been noted by scholars for decades, the toxicity of a particular type of populist discourse that is performative, rhetorical, stylistic and emotional is under-explored; particularly given the damage it has done in the responses of populist leaders to the Covid-19 pandemic. More recently, scholars of the performative turn in populism (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021) have elaborated on the concept of performance and performativity in relationship to populism (Aiolfi, 2022). Expanding on Moffitt's (2016) definition, a performative approach defines populism as a political style, an open-ended repertoire of political performances characterized primarily by the performative representation of the people, the elite, and the leader (Aiolfi, 2022). The leader, in particular, plays a key role in 'acting' ordinary by using what he or she believes to be characteristics of the ordinary people he or she is targeting as a way of relating to them (Ostiguy, 2017). As Moffitt argued, 'bad manners' is one way populist leaders 'perform ordinariness' and present themselves as the true representative of the people no matter their socio-economic position. By breaking taboos through the use of shocking speech, right-wing populists in particular prove themselves as 'norm-breakers' willing to upend the status quo and demonstrate to the audience that they are the opposite of the 'elite'. Scholars have referred to the norm-breaking performative style of populist speech as "disruptive" (Sørensen, 2021), "transgressive" (Aiolfi, 2022), "bad-mannered" (Moffitt, 2016) and "the flaunting of the low" (Ostiguy, 2017). However, while each category contributes to our understanding of populist style and performance to a degree, they either fail to reflect the extreme behavior and language of some populists, focus only on the language of populism apart from the core elements of 'the people' or simply sound too neutral or permissive when describing blatantly racist, misogynistic and crude behavior of certain, usually, right-wing populists. The terms overlook how many of the norm transgressions express sexism, ableism or racism degrading liberal norms of equality in the public sphere and giving permission increasingly to hate speech. We believe a stronger, more apt category of this type of populist rhetoric must be developed to address this increasing trend of speaking the unspeakable to prove ordinariness.

We build on Moffitt's and Ostiguy's definition of 'bad-mannered' and 'the flaunting of the low' to argue that particularly extreme,

bad-mannered populism falls into its own category of ‘chauvinistic populism’. Pushing beyond the too-tame category of ‘transgressive’ or ‘disruptive’, chauvinistic populists not only break taboos and political decorum to prove they are ordinary but use crass, misogynistic and racist language, and belittle, mimic, abuse and intimidate others through their performance. Chauvinistic populism not only indicates toxic performativity in style but shares with other definitions of right-wing populism an “unreasonable belief in the superiority or dominance of one’s own group or people, who are seen as strong and virtuous, while others are considered weak, unworthy, or inferior” (Heywood, 2014). Like welfare chauvinism (Enns-Jedenastik, 2018) or male chauvinism, chauvinistic populism privileges one group over the other and redefines ‘who’ represents the superior people over others. The term helps bridge the obvious but understudied connection between toxic masculinity and populism (Gould, 2021) as well as the nativist, derogatory hierarchies established in exclusionary populism.

CHAUVINISTIC POPULISM AND THE CRISIS OF COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic provided an atypical crisis for populists. Unlike a security crisis or economic crisis, Covid-19 ushered in an unknown virus that required a medical response and the expertise of health officials. Lasco and Curato (2019) examined how populism can intersect with a health crisis because of the innate tension between populist ‘outsiders’ and medical experts who can be seen as elites. Generally, they found that populist leaders followed two possible responses to a pandemic: (1) a reliance on experts who can “diffuse a politically-charged moment by placing the control of the situation away from politicians to (seemingly) non-partisan and dispassionate experts” or (2) a continuation of the populist response that sows divisions between regular people and scientific experts, simplifies the crisis in black and white terms, and sows distrust in the institutions and medical community in charge of the medical response. In the case of chauvinistic populists, the leaders followed the second path, choosing to craft a populist pandemic response that simplified the crisis, downplayed its severity, blamed others for their own policy failures, and showed apathy and indifference to suffering particularly as the tragedy of their own inaction sowed increased illness and death.

To understand the chauvinistic populist response to the Covid-19 pandemic, we examine the language of three leaders we classify as chauvinistic

populists, U.S. President Trump, India's Prime Minister Modi, and Brazil's President Bolsonaro. We examine the statements they made during the Covid-19 pandemic using a combination of official, journalistic, campaign and scholarly sources and find that it fit into a pattern found in current research on populist responses to the Covid-19 pandemic more broadly (Cepaluni et al., 2022; Charron et al., 2022; Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021; Lasco & Curato, 2019; McKee et al., 2021), but with a heightened use of transgressive, toxic emotions emblematic of chauvinistic populists. We adapted the medical populist framework developed by Lasco and Curato to analyze the norm-breaking behavior and pandemic responses of the three leaders we examined. The framework contains four parts:

1. Superiority of the true people and blame toward others: Following the core of populism, a chauvinist populist response to the pandemic pits the 'true' people against others who are to blame. Chauvinistic populists emphasized national and individual superiority in resisting the virus. Chauvinistic populists also blamed others such as China, technocratic elites and scientists, individual bureaucrats, and even past leaders (Lasco & Curato, 2019; McKee et al., 2021).
2. Contempt for institutions and technocratic response: Despite relying on institutions and their own public health officials to combat the pandemic, chauvinistic populists did not last long before beginning to undermine the authority of medical experts and governmental responses to the pandemic. Chauvinistic populists contradicted public health recommendations, refused to follow their own official guidelines for face-masks, social distancing, or stay-at-home orders, and quickly became locked in an antagonistic relationship with governmental officials.
3. Invocation of Mystic Knowledge and folklore: Chauvinistic populists said extreme, conspiratorial, and seemingly outrageous things about the virus itself. Leaders made bold, unverifiable claims that undermined the work of public health officials and rejected evidence that contradicted their claims. As McKee et al. (2021) state, "[populists] adopted the tactics associated with denialism, including promotion of conspiracy theories, cherry picking evidence, citing false experts, moving goalposts, and employing a range of logical fallacies" (p. 512). Chauvinistic populists also promoted unscientific cures lacking any evidential basis, most notably Hydroxychloroquine, or injecting bleach.

4. Indifference to suffering and death: Chauvinistic populists showed an unwillingness to express grief or empathy for the victims and instead displayed indifference and apathy to Covid deaths. By calling attention to the inevitability of death, the “natural” or unstoppable characteristics of disease, and their own limitations as individuals, they have attempted to legitimize lack of response as a valid response to national emergencies. In the following sections, we demonstrate the framework of chauvinistic populism in each case study of pandemic response.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: CHAUVINISTIC POPULISM AT A GLOBAL LEVEL

As discussed earlier in the chapter, President Trump’s election and the rhetoric of his campaign and public speeches shifted the expectations for how US presidents should talk. His uncouth, simple and sometimes shockingly crass and insulting speech introduced what we call chauvinistic populism to an American audience not used to hearing this type of talk from a president. However, Trump’s ability to say the unspeakable and to use Twitter to spread it, garnered a lot of attention and with it, political power. Other leaders noticed and it was not long before they were either copying a similar style or more blatantly repeating their own chauvinistic style more forcefully.

Without question, Trump had the biggest global stage; when it became clear that the novel Covid-19 virus could not be contained in China, leaders looked to Trump as a global leader to show how a pandemic could be contained by a massive health care industry and scientific community. Instead, Trump’s pandemic response quickly turned chauvinistic and he followed in a populist-style that followed the framework laid out above.

Superiority of the True People and Blame Toward Others

Like other populists, President Trump created a divide between the true or ‘pure’ people and the elite before the pandemic (see Löfflmann, 2021). However, during the Covid-19 response, Trump positioned several different groups of ‘others’ in opposition to his ‘pure people’. He blamed China by repeatedly referring to COVID-19 as the ‘China virus’ and declaring that, “the world is now suffering as a result of the malfeasance of the Chinese government” (McNeil Jr. & Jacobs, 2020). He blamed international institutions such as the World Health Organization for covering up

for China and declared that the US would withdraw from the WHO completely and cut all funding to the institution (Roberts, 2022). He also blamed domestic actors, particularly the media and democrats, of playing up the threat of the virus to try and derail his presidency (Roberts, 2022). This quickly quelled any hope of a unified response to the virus and instead politicized it such that taking public health recommendations from the CDC and imposing mitigation efforts became a ‘democratic’ response rather than simply a necessary response to a pandemic (Rudolph & Hetherington, 2021). Simultaneously, Trump claimed national superiority claiming, “the virus will not have a chance against us [Americans]” (cited in: Woodward, 2020).

Contempt for Institutions and Technocratic Response

While Trump was quick to blame international institutions such as the WHO, he had a mixed reaction to federal public health institutions and experts—at first relying on them as the face of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, but then contradicting their recommendations particularly as it became clear that the lockdown mitigation efforts would go on longer than a few weeks. As Roberts (2022) found, Trump was willing to cooperate with federal agencies and Congress to inject over \$2 trillion dollars into economic relief and assistance and a massive \$12.4 billion into Operation Warp Speed for vaccine development but was “notably averse to working with the scientific and medical communities to contain the spread of the virus” (p. 8). He actively contradicted Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx during press conferences. Once the CDC and the taskforce reversed guidance on mask-wearing and recommended them indoors, Trump actively resisted wearing a mask and even mocked then-presidential candidate Biden for wearing one (Rudolph & Hetherington, 2021).

Moreover, lacking a federal strategy, states began making their own lockdown plans and closures, many following the lead of early adopters such as California and New York. Rather than supporting state decisions, Trump railed against states with more extreme mitigation measures like school-closures and stay-at-home orders declaring that, “some governors have gone too far” and defended protesters who defied lockdown orders (Givertash, 2020). Already by April 2020, Trump had fully politicized the public health response by rallying against lockdowns, masking, and social distancing even calling for ‘liberating’ people from the lockdowns imposed by the mostly democratic governors who were now forced to take action on their own. Internally, the fracturing was even more antagonistic. The

House Committee's Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis report (2022) stated that the White House formed its own alternative committee that coordinated the messaging and policy guidance on the Covid-19 response separate from the White House Coronavirus Task Force. Dubbed the 'China Virus Huddles' these meetings were run by Mr. Kushner and attended by an exclusive group of senior Trump Administration officials, including Dr. Birx, Senior Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway, Assistant to the President Hope Hicks, and HHS Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy Paul Mango.

The recommendations of the China Virus Huddle were shaped by Dr. Atlas, an advocate of herd immunity as a main response to the virus, who became a formal White House advisor in July 2020 although his influence on President Trump began as early as March. The Select Committee reported that, "Dr. Birx told the Select Subcommittee that 'parallel data streams flowed into the Oval Office during Dr. Atlas's White House tenure and influenced President Trump to downplay the severity of the virus and reject many science-backed mitigation measures. Dr. Birx also confirmed that Dr. Atlas's data likely made their way into certain public statements by President Trump and were "not consistent with the information" she provided" (Select Committee, 2022, p. 9). By September 2020, the recommendations of Dr. Fauci and Dr. Brix of the official White House Coronavirus Task Force were now contradicted directly by Trump and the unofficial, internal 'China Virus Huddle'. As Birx and other officials on the White House coronavirus task force warned of a Fall surge that was worsening stating, "the US is in a new phase of the pandemic where the virus 'is extraordinarily widespread'. Trump replied the next day, calling Dr. Birx 'pathetic'" (Cole & Subramaniam, 2020).

Invocation of Mystic Knowledge and Folklore

While it is well-documented that Trump received up-to-date scientific evidence and understood how severe and dangerous the virus was as early as February, he repeatedly stated that Covid-19 was not a big threat and that any drastic response was overblown. Trump used a combination of denialism and unscientific remedies as well as outlandish predictions to downplay the virus and make it appear less dangerous. For example, on 30 January 2020, Trump claimed: "We think we have it very well under control. We have very little problem in this country—five" (referring to the number of cases reported in the US) (Date, 2020). Trump not only

downplayed the virus but regularly predicted various ways that the virus would disappear on its own or compared it to milder illnesses like the flu (Wolfe & Dale, 2020). In tweets and public statements, he made claims such as “once the weather starts to warm the virus hopefully becomes weaker, and then gone” (Trump, February 7, 2020) and “people think it will go away in April due to the heat” (Wilner, February 10, 2020). He also stated that the coronavirus would disappear on its own “like a miracle” (Paz, 2020).

Trump also made numerous unfounded and shocking medical claims mostly off the cuff and off-script. In February 2020, Trump claimed that scientists were “very close to a vaccine” although it would be nearly a year before one would be available (Thielking, 2020). He called for immediate use of hydroxychloroquine as a preventative treatment against infection despite a lack of evidence for its effectiveness (Yamey & Gonsalves, 2020) resulting in the deaths of nearly 200 people in the first half of 2020 who took hydroxychloroquine without a prescription (Gander, 2020). On April 23, 2020, Trump suggested that injecting or drinking disinfectant or bleach could cure COVID-19, prompting experts to urgently warn the public against inhaling or ingesting bleach (Yamey & Gonsalves, 2020). Trump also suggested that perhaps ultraviolet light or sunlight “brought inside the body” might kill the virus (Funke, 2020). Trump’s willingness to make outrageous, unscientific claims and promote folk remedies became one of the most startling responses to the pandemic by chauvinistic populists.

Indifference to Suffering and Death

President Trump not only downplayed the severity of the virus but also took actions that had detrimental effects particularly on Trump supporters themselves. He readily adopted a fringe position that advocated for herd immunity as a rapid way out of the pandemic despite the fact that stopping mitigation efforts like masking, testing, social distancing and isolation led to more Covid-19 cases and deaths. For example, after Dr. Atlas joined the White House as an advisor to the president, President Trump started using the phrase herd immunity in public statements and interviews as a response to loosening mandates and mitigation recommendations. In an August 31, 2020, interview with Fox News host Laura Ingraham, Trump stated, “Well, once you get to a certain number—we use the word ‘herd,’ right—once you get to a certain number it’s going to go away” (Select Committee,

2022, p.117). And in September, he remarked during a Town Hall event, “you’ll develop herd—like a herd mentality,” and “it’s going to be herd-developed, and that’s going to happen” (Select Committee, 2022). When a reporter questioned the White House strategy in September quoting that a thousand Americans are dying a day, Trump responded defensively, “They are dying. That’s true. And you -- it is what it is” (Cole & Subramaniam, 2020). Although Trump touted the success of his administration’s response to Covid-19 regularly, he rarely mentioned the victims or acknowledged the high death toll. Trump reluctantly made a brief public statement as a tweet the day after the US crossed the 100,000 confirmed death toll in May 2020 and regularly cited data that showed the death rate as a proportion of the infection rate rather than as a percent of the overall population. He did not want to acknowledge the fact that the US has less than 5% of the world’s population but had 25% of global deaths from Covid-19 in mid-2020.

In all, Trump responded to the Covid-19 pandemic with a chauvinistic populist performance that not only had divisive and devastating consequences for the US, but made possible emulation and adoration by other world leaders who shared his penchant for breaking norms and shattering what could be said in a public sphere. Trump, with his worldwide audience and global social media presence, showed an alternative path for populists around the world who used the pandemic as a political opportunity and a chance to perform crisis for political purposes instead of public good. Next, we examine the response of Prime Minister Modi in India to the pandemic and demonstrate how a similar framework of chauvinistic populism guided Modi’s response.

NARENDRA MODI: THE HINDUTVA PIVOT

While India’s Prime Minister Modi predates Trump as a political leader, the transformation of Modi from Hindu Nationalist to Hindu populist figure occurs in the 2014–2019 period (Yilmaz et al., 2021), intersecting with the Trump presidency. Modi’s appeal toward rural and economically disenfranchised Indians skyrocketed in the inter-election years (Jaffrelot, 2019), further evidence of the populist turn taken by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The interclass success of the BJP also speaks to the efficacy of Modi’s chauvinist rebranding, given that party policy did not meaningfully reflect the economic empowerment of the Indian poor in the 2014–2019 period any more than previous governments (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Moreover, Modi's appeal to and support from Hindutva political forces has drawn comparison to Trump's similar relationship to the alt-right in the United States (Thobani, 2018) with both able to court fringe but highly politically active allies while cultivating their bases.

India's Pandemic Response

Narendra Modi followed a similar pandemic framework to Trump but with cultural specificity to his audience. Moreover, he exhibited more flexibility in his response which is likely why he remained popular even after his pandemic response resulted in a high death toll in India. In true populist performance, he adapted the categories to his audience to make them most impactful but nevertheless followed in the same pattern as other chauvinistic populists.

(1) Superiority of the true people and blame toward others.

Modi's understanding of a "true people" is found in India's majority Hindu population, for whom Modi leads as "Emperor of Hindu hearts" (Hindu Hriday Samrat, a title popularized during his 2014 electoral campaign) (Sinha, 2021). This predated the pandemic as Modi implicitly and explicitly worked to curtail the rights and privileges of non-Hindu Indians. For example, traditional forms of Islamic divorce practices (the talaq) were restricted under Modi, while India curtailed nominal forms of autonomy in the contested and largely Muslim Kashmir region. Most dramatically, India's 2019 amendment to its 1955 Citizenship Act specifically excluded Muslims from qualifying to receive streamlined citizenship, in contrast to other religious minorities, an explicit example of religious favoritism.

Modi's appeal to the people includes national exceptionalism, stating in January 2021 that "India is among the most successful countries in saving lives" because "we transformed the fight against coronavirus into a people's movement" (Outlook India, 2021) this as a medical oxygen shortage was underway, a spike in deaths loomed and Indian state-level governments quarreled over distribution of medical supplies (UN News, 2022).

(2) Contempt for Institutions and Technocratic Response

Modi's expressions of contempt have not centered on anti-intellectualism or medical skepticism, but on attacking democratic pluralism in Indian

politics. As the pandemic began to recede in early 2022, Modi went on the offensive against the Indian National Congress, his primary political opposition and frequent critics of Modi's pandemic response.

In February of 2022 he insulted the "arrogance" of India's congressional opposition groups and declared that "Corona too was used for politics" by them, while stating that congress had "crossed all limits" and became a "blind opposition, in an insult to democracy" (Times of India, 2022). Modi's divisive rhetoric is not strictly anti-technocratic, like some other populists, but is focused instead on using political opportunism to further expand BJP power, with Modi playing an active role in leading the party to numerous electoral successes even as India emerged as one of the worst-suffering nations in the world under the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, he has confused an already complicated COVID-19 response by villainizing opposition groups and deriding India's legislature.

Similar to Trump, Modi blamed other institutional actors for recommending lockdowns as a way to stop the spread of the virus. As a second, even more devastating wave of COVID-19 cases ravaged India in 2021, Modi explicitly contradicted public health recommendations stating: "In a situation like today, we have to save the country from a lockdown. If you all work together, create awareness, then there is no need for containment, never mind a lockdown" (All India 2021).

(3) Invocation of Mystic Knowledge and Folklore

Following other chauvinist populists, Modi referred to folk remedies, mystic knowledge and quack theories, often contradicting medical recommendations and scientific evidence. He suggested that Indians "practice yoga daily" because "COVID-19 specifically attacks our respiratory system, which is strengthened on doing pranayama [a breathing exercise]" ("Free COVID Jabs for all Indian adults" 2021), and told the country that, "Maryada Purushottam Ram's [a significant figure of Hindu worship] message is for us to be disciplined ... teaches us patience and discipline. Patience and discipline are both needed to fight Covid". Modi's invocation of mystic knowledge in response to Covid-19 influenced other domestic leaders to do the same, leading Uttarakhand state's governor to tell pilgrims that, "Kumbh [a Hindu religious holiday] is at the bank of the River Ganga. Maa Ganga's blessings are there in the flow. So, there should be no corona" despite heavy restrictions on Islamic holidays in the same region (BBC News, 2021b). And when he spoke to a global

audience at Davos in January 2021, Modi delivered an address that highlighted India's cultural rather than scientific response to the pandemic: "India has also fulfilled its global responsibility at this time of crisis by practicing thousands of years old invocation *सर्वे सन्तु नरिमया* [a mantra for universal health]" and that his government had "guided the world regarding India's traditional medicine system Ayurveda which is helpful in boosting immunity" (Modi, 2021). The public mysticism of Modi reflects a willingness of chauvinistic populists to espouse a folk knowledge over science that reifies them as part of the 'ordinary people' in opposition to the scientific elite.

(4) Indifference to Suffering and Death

Rather than a general indifference to victims of the pandemic, Modi has employed targeted forms of apathy, an intersection between callousness and convenience, to further his political agenda. Critics have noted that India's draconic lockdowns came with almost no prior warning, and that the fallout of the sudden announcement included repressive and sometimes violent measures taken to control the return of suddenly unemployed migrant workers to their hometowns (Harriss, 2020). As millions of Indians found themselves suddenly bereft of incomes in Spring of 2020, BJP-controlled state governments began cutting existing benefits (Venkataramakrishnan, 2020). Most dramatic, however, may be India's "vaccine diplomacy", by which India fostered international goodwill by the rapid manufacture and exportation of hundreds of millions of COVID-19 vaccine doses- at a time in which many regions of India itself were woefully unvaccinated and faced critical shortages of doses.

Modi's chauvinistic populist response to the Covid-19 pandemic shows cultural specificity but also chauvinistic populist generality—while he followed a similar playbook to Trump in his statements, he drew on the specifics of Muslim 'others', cultural traditions as mystic knowledge, and Indian national exceptionalism demonstrating that the performativity of chauvinistic populism is not static but iterative and reciprocated with the audience.

JAIR BOLSONARO: LATIN AMERICA'S "TROPICAL TRUMP"

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro is another long-term political insider. Emerging from a long tenure in Brazil's House of Deputies to a dramatic electoral victory in 2018, Bolsonaro has upset Brazilian politics as the most extreme candidate to hold the presidential office since the end of Brazil's period of military rule. Bolsonaro is undeniably the most traditionally chauvinistic among our analyzed populists. His speeches are constantly littered with performative machismo, with threats of violence, sexism, blunt nationalism, and homophobia all competing to elicit outrage. Like Modi, masculinization of image and rhetoric has buoyed Bolsonaro's electoral success. Unemployed men were disproportionately represented in the pro-Bolsonaro electorate (Barros & Santos-Silva, 2020), indicating the appeal of machismo to the most socially vulnerable male populations.

Brazil's Pandemic Response

Bolsonaro presents an almost unbelievable portraiture of chauvinistic populism. His rhetoric has espoused strict superiority of nationality, religion, gender, ideology, and sexuality, while frequently pairing positive, assertive claims to superiority with insults, threats, or vulgarities against a denigrated oppositional group. In his Covid-19 pandemic response, this only escalated.

Superiority of the True People and Blame Toward Others

Despite his campaign slogans proclaiming "Brazil above everything, God above everyone", Bolsonaro valorizes the superiority of the Brazilian people. He argued that disease resistance is natural to Brazilians, who "never catch anything" because "you see someone jump into a sewer, get out, and nothing happens to him" (Encarnacion, 2020), and Trumpeted that, "God is a Brazilian- the cure is right here!" as he endorsed hydroxychloroquine (Londoño & Simões, 2020). Bolsonaro has integrated personal exceptionalism into his COVID-19 defense as well. In March 2020, he told Brazilians that, "With my history as an athlete, if I were infected with the virus, I would have no reason to worry" ("Coronavirus: Outcry after Trump" 2020). Even when he did contract COVID-19 in June 2021, after refusing to be vaccinated and continuing to attend political events,

Bolsonaro attempted to spin his recovery into an act of personal strength and the anti-institutional agenda, saying that he "... was medicated from the beginning with hydroxychloroquine ... I felt better the next day" (Rochabrun & Benassatto, 2020).

Contempt for Institutions and Technocratic Response

Bolsonaro made his confrontational position clear early in the pandemic, when he delivered an inflammatory speech accusing opposed governors and mayors of attempting to undermine his regime: "The people will soon see that they were tricked by these governors and by the large part of the media when it comes to coronavirus ... It is a shameless campaign, a colossal and absurd campaign against the head of state ... They want to force me out however possible" (Phillips, 2020).

This rhetoric is a continuation of a recurrent theme in Bolsonaro's political career: contempt for democratic pluralism, and a clear idolization of Brazil's military-fascist legacy. Bolsonaro's contempt for Brazil's sub-national systems of government is sufficient that the acquisition of COVID-19 vaccines from international sources was a source of open conflict between federal and local governments, as city officials attempted to circumvent federal restrictions to supply their constituents with Sinovac and other imported vaccines.

Invocation of Mystic Knowledge and Folklore

Following expectations of chauvinistic populism, Bolsonaro invoked mystical knowledge claims. In March of 2020, he claimed that, "for 90 percent of the population, this [COVID-19] will be a little flu, or nothing", and that "the virus arrived, and will pass shortly" (ABC, News). Bolsonaro frequently made outrageous claims with no medical basis. From touting his own resistance ("With my history as an athlete, if I were infected with the virus, I would have no reason to worry!") insinuating that vaccination would feminize Brazilians ("... a woman starts to grow a beard or if a man starts to speak with an effeminate voice ..."), he has brought strange and unverifiable claims to bear at all stages of Brazil's medical crisis (Hall, 2020).

It was this exceptional willingness to make unsupported claims coupled with the described institutional contempt that caused Brazil's Supreme Court to open inquiries into Bolsonaro himself. After earning temporary bans from major social media sites, Bolsonaro finally overstepped the boundaries of judicial acceptability when he publicly drew a connection

between COVID-19 vaccination and risk of contracting HIV/AIDS during a live stream, saying: "... those who are fully vaccinated, who took the second dose, show after fifteen days, these people are developing acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [AIDS] much faster than expected" (Biller, 2021).

Indifference to Suffering and Death

From the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic until the present, Bolsonaro appeared unconcerned by death tolls, dismissive of the need or impact of government intervention, and untroubled by his own role in Brazil's catastrophic pandemic response. Even as Brazil had among the greatest global death tolls related to COVID-19, Bolsonaro refused to follow distancing, masking or vaccination guidelines personally. Rather than use his platform as head of state to sympathize or show solidarity, he belittled Brazilians.

When complaints mounted against his regime's sluggish pandemic response, he accused Brazilians of being too "queer" to handle coronavirus. During a particularly lethal spike in March 2021, Bolsonaro told Brazil to "Stop whining. How long are you going to keep crying about it?" (BBC News, 2021a, b). Bolsonaro's apparent indifference to Brazil's high rates of transmission and mortality has alloyed his rhetoric with alarming callousness. When confronted in April 2020 by statistics indicating that Brazil had overtaken even China in COVID-19 severity, all Bolsonaro had to say was "So what? I'm sorry. What do you want me to do? I'm Messiah [Bolsonaro's middle name is Messias] but I can't do miracles" (The Guardian 2020). As he continued to host rallies and appear in public, he shrugged off any responsibility to minimize viral transmission with "Seventy per cent [of Brazilians] are going to catch the virus. There's nothing to be done" (Shamy, 2020). Bolsonaro's chauvinistic populist response was the most callous of our four examples we examined and Brazil's Covid-19 response was notoriously disastrous because of it.

CONCLUSION: CHAUVINISTIC POPULISM IN DARK TIMES

The commonalities between the populist performance, style, and rhetoric of Trump, Modi, and Bolsonaro make apparent a series of troubling trends in political populism particularly as populist leaders faced the Covid-19 pandemic. Chauvinistic populists are the extreme norm-breakers of

political decorum. More than just transgress, they disgust. This performance of ‘ordinariness’ is re-interpreted as shocking the elite rather than any real reflection of ‘the people’. The divisive, norm-defying behaviors displayed by Trump, Modi and Bolsonaro during their respective elections became worse as they faced a crisis of the magnitude of Covid-19. Rather than rely on established health care experts and institutional processes set up to handle health emergencies, chauvinistic populist leaders responded to the global pandemic by spreading distrust, division and denial when just the opposite was necessary. This response crippled a national leadership and broke down the unity required to effectively combat a crisis scenario such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the chauvinistic populist responses to Covid-19 followed a similar playbook despite radically different locales, populations, levels of development and cultural histories.

Most importantly, the consequences of a chauvinistic populist pandemic response were dire. Over the past two years, research shows that the more extreme right-wing populists had the least successful responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, only five months after the start of the pandemic, the United States, Brazil, Russia, India, and the United Kingdom had the top five most cases of Covid-19 in the world with only 27% of the world’s population (McKee et al., 2021). Kavakli (2020) found that right-wing populists in high-income countries lagged behind other governments in implementing lock-downs, recommending face-masks and conducting contact-tracing whereas Bayerlein et al. (2021) reported excess mortality, on average, more than twice as high in populist-governed countries as in non-populist governed countries. Chauvinistic populism had real consequences that harmed an effective pandemic response showing that not only is it transgressive and disruptive of democratic norms of civilized discourse, but it can be deadly. Identifying chauvinistic populism and recognizing it for its harmful human costs as well as its degrading effect on the political climate is crucial to protecting against its most egregious outcomes.

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PART II

The Impact of Populist
Communication on International
Politics



Performing the Populist Repertoire on the Global Stage: A Critical Approach to IR and Populist Communication

Théo Aiolfi

INTRODUCTION

Nearly twenty years after Mudde (2004) talked about “the populist *zeitgeist*”, there is no doubt that the concept is as relevant as ever in capturing the spirit of the times. The academic literature, which was already growing at an exponential rate since the 1990s (Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 2017), skyrocketed after 2016, following the twin shock of Donald Trump’s win in the United States presidential elections and the victory of the ‘Leave’ campaign during the Brexit referendum. Once a phenomenon exclusively studied by political theorists and scholars in comparative politics, the “global rise of populism” (Moffitt, 2016) began attracting the attention of scholars in International Relations (IR). As leaders and movements

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associated with populism began to take legislative and executive power within key positions of the world order, the influence of the phenomenon could not be limited to domestic politics anymore (Chrysosgelos, 2017).

However, the intersection of populism and IR has until recently remained limited (Destradi & Plaguemann, 2019). On the one hand, research on populism has primarily focused on case studies of specific countries, which is explained by the emergence of populism at the margin of domestic politics, as a way for critical challengers to contest a political status quo. Furthermore, references to an antagonism between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, which is the consensual starting point between most approaches to the concept (Katsambekis, 2020), have historically been articulated within the context of electoral politics at the national level (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). On the other hand, scholars in IR tend to “treat populism as a monolith” or a “catch-all term,” which “makes it virtually useless for any differentiated analysis” (Stengel et al., 2019, p.4). Indeed, as opposed to the vibrant and eclectic debates within the nascent field of populism studies, the first scholars in IR engaging with populism have overwhelmingly adopted the mainstream approach framing it as a “thin ideology” (Destradi & Plaguemann, 2019, p.713) most notably advocated by Mudde (2004). As such, IR interventions on populism have failed to take into account the most recent challenges raised by the critical scholarship on populism which attempted to overcome the normative biases and conceptual limitations of the ideational approach.

In this chapter, I will make the case for a critical and interdisciplinary approach to populism inspired by the work of Laclau (2005) and Moffitt (2016) that frames populism as a political style. In this perspective, which is part of the wider discursive-performative approach (Ostiguyet et al., 2021), populism is understood as an open-ended repertoire of political performances characterised by three core clusters: (1) performances of identity, (2) performances of transgression, and (3) performances of crisis. After developing this definition and providing a brief outline of each cluster, I will focus more specifically on performances of identity. Successively analysing the three facets of populism—the people, the elite and the populist leader—I will discuss how these are used for the political communication of politicians embracing populism on the global stage. Although the populist style should not be reduced to a mere communication strategy, which would notably underestimate its intrinsic performativity, this theoretical chapter will focus on the case of national representatives performing in international political events to gesture at what this stylistic lens

illuminates about their political communication. After this elaboration of the form taken by each of these three dimensions from an IR perspective, I will conclude with a plea to go beyond state-centrism and to consider the emergence of transnational and global uses of populism.

POPULISM AS A POLITICAL STYLE

After decades of theoretical blur, a mainstream consensus has emerged in the literature on populism around the work of Mudde (2004), which coalesced into what is now dubbed the ideational approach to populism. Adapting the influential morphological approach developed by Freeden (1998), Mudde famously argued that populism is a “thin-centred ideology” founded on the antagonism between two homogenous groups, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”. Because populism fails to provide a comprehensive range of answers to all the political problems, “it is unable to stand alone as a practical political ideology” (Stanley, 2008, p.95). In other words, the shallowness of populism implies the need to get attached to a “full” ideology, like socialism or conservatism. However, the criticism of the creator of the very concept of thin ideology, who argued that populism is “ideologically too scrawny even to be thin” (Freeden, 2017, p.3), shed doubts on the accuracy of such a depiction of populism.

Inspired by the influential work of Laclau (2005), critical scholars have developed over the years a set of challenges to some of the main assumptions of the ideational approach, highlighting fundamental issues like the implication that populism relies on homogeneity and anti-pluralism (Katsambekis, 2020). In recent years, they have coalesced within the discursive–performative approach (Ostiguy et al., 2021). Dissatisfied with the all-too-common conflation within the mainstream literature between populism, nationalism, and far-right ideology more generally, some of these scholars have sought to provide conceptual clarity. De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) notably developed a sophisticated model to explain the overlap as well as the differences between populism and nationalism based on their respective focus on ‘the people’ and ‘the nation’. In a later work shaping the premises of a unified critical approach to populism, De Cleen et al. (2018, p.655) took this point further by insisting on the need to distinguish “the normative vision” of populist actors from “the way they seek to achieve this normative vision”. This argument can be traced back within Laclau’s seminal work where he argued that populism was located at the level of political practices, not ideas:

A movement is not populist because in its politics or ideology it presents actual contents identifiable as populist, but rather because it shows a particular logic of articulation of those contents—whatever they may be (Laclau, 2005: 33).

This divide between ideas and their articulations has led many scholars influenced by Laclau to refer to populism as a logic, but this has created another conceptual blur. Indeed, adopting a Laclauian perspective on discourse, this means that populism is “an ontological and not an ontic category” (Laclau, 2005, p.33). However, because discourse is understood as the all-encompassing structure of meaning in Laclau’s work, that leads this finer distinction to get lost as both ideas and their articulations get subsumed within the same catch-all category of discourse. This is notably evident in the perspective of De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017, p.307) which refer to both nationalism (on the ontic level) and populism (on the ontological level) as “analytically distinct discourses”. I argue that Laclau’s central intuition speaks to wider debates on the divide between content and form, and that it would be losing sight of this distinction to subsume them within the same category of discourse. As such, I have chosen to diverge from Laclauian orthodoxy by defining populism as a style, in clear contrast with the ideological content it gives shape to.

POPULISM’S INTERDISCIPLINARITY: PERFORMANCE, REPertoire AND PERFORMATIVITY

In addition to offering an analytical opposition to ideology, the concept of style also enables an engagement with the socio-cultural and performative dimensions of populism which were most prominently developed by respectively Ostiguy (2017) and Moffitt (2016). Indeed, although other scholars used the concept of style to talk of populism before—including notably Knight (1998), Canovan (1999) and Jagers and Walgrave (2007)—prior definitions remained heterogeneous and inconsistent. Moffitt was the first to develop an operational and sophisticated definition of the populist style, and his work constitutes the main theoretical influence for my approach as it provides insights not only on populism but more generally on the concept of political style. However, its main weakness is that Moffitt did not properly engage with the interdisciplinary influences of performance studies on the notion of style.

As such, building on the canon of performance studies, I define populism as an open-ended repertoire of political performances grounded in

the performative articulation of an antagonism between people and elite. Performance is understood here as “showing doing” (Schechner, 2013, p.38), any practice characterised by two necessary conditions: relationality—that is the presence of two people engaging in a social interaction—and self-awareness—that is the awareness that the interaction takes place and has meaning. By extension, political performances are “a brand of ‘showing doing’ with some degree of political intent behind both the act and (potentially) the witnessing” (Rowe, 2013, p.11). The concept of repertoire is grounded in Taylor’s classic opposition between archive and repertoire. As opposed to “the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)” she pointed out the complementary yet underrated importance of the “ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (Taylor, 2003, p.19). Although specific performances may disappear, their meaning and their intent take another life through the action of another performer and the concept of the repertoire captures this continuity. Finally, because there is no such thing as a pre-existing people or elite ‘out there’ to which populism can objectively refer to, actors adopting the populist style rely on performativity: the ontological articulation of meaning created through repeated performances (Butler, 1988). Understood this way, performance and performativity are symbiotically linked: performances constitute the site on which performativity comes into action while performativity expresses the ontological effects that performances create.

At this stage, it is important to discuss the connection between the concepts of performance and communication. In many ways, performance studies and communication studies are cognate fields exploring in a different way the similar question of the interaction between two or more individuals. Both are interdisciplinary disciplines that borrow concepts and tools from multiple disciplinary horizons, particularly linguistics. But while communication studies draws its main influences from media studies and information science, performance studies is grounded in the study of the arts, notably theatre and dance, along with the more interpretive approaches to anthropology and cultural studies (Schechner, 2013, p.12). As such, the main difference in perspective offered by the choice to address political communication through the lens of performance is its stronger focus on the aesthetic focus of communication. What that means practically is exploring some of the blind spots of traditional communication studies: theatricality, symbolism, repertoire, style, and so on.

Conversely, it is worth pointing out that the approach of performance studies is not without its flaws, falling at times in the pitfall of excessively focusing on superfluous elements or relying on an opaque theoretical perspective lacking practical applications. Indeed, the perspective of communication studies has much to offer to the study of performance but, in the context of this edited volume, this chapter seeks to stand out by offering a peek into the distinctly creative lens of performance studies. Furthermore, if one considers political communication in its narrowest sense as the marketing of one's message to potential voters, examining the performativity in populism means expanding that strategic aspect to incorporate the ontological effect of performance. It means examining how an antagonistic performance of the collective—'the people'—can create a sense of belonging through identification with an individuality—'the leader'—and a drive to push back against an oppressive power—'the elite'. This is precisely what the next section examines.

THE THREE CLUSTERS OF THE POPULIST REPERTOIRE

If populism is a repertoire of performances, what are its specific features? Stripped to its core, the populist style articulates a society in crisis where an elite is failing in its duty to represent and act on behalf of the people, and where radical change is embodied through the salutary intervention of a transgressive leader. In other words, populism is built around three performance clusters which all constitute necessary but not sufficient components of the style: (1) performances of identity, which articulate the Laclauian antagonism between people and elite through the embodied figure of a populist leader; (2) performances of transgression (Aiolfi, 2022), which consist in breaking norms of political significance to appear subversive and more authentic than other political actors; (3) performances of crisis (Moffitt, 2015), which performatively develop a crisis narrative to imply the need for urgent change before society collapses. Such a perspective on populism is thus ideologically agnostic, which means it offers nothing more than a blueprint which can only take shape when it is combined with ideological content. As such, *this populist template should be the starting point for analysis, not its end*. Discussing what type of crisis is being introduced, what kind of elite is being criticised, which people is being represented, what solutions are being offered, which norms are being broken and what type of leader is being offered in salvation are the questions that the stylistic approach to populism seeks to address.

This is particularly relevant when applying this understanding of populism to the field of IR. As stated above, while the populist style does influence the political communication of world leaders who use it on the global stage, it is important to point out that populism implies much more than communication and could not be limited to its strategic dimension. Likewise, although I focus on the role of representatives elected at the level of domestic politics, populism can be—and has been—mobilised by actors beyond electoral politics at every level of political activity (Chou et al., 2021). This raises another complex question, as well as a limitation of the perspective adopted in this chapter: the perspective of the audience. Any performance can be divided into two sides: production and reception, or in other words the actor and the audience. The discussion conducted in this chapter primarily engages with performance production, the actor-driven side of political performances. This does not mean that the audience is not an important component of performance analysis as various academic subfields—like ‘audience theory’ in cultural studies (Livingstone, 1998) or ‘audience reception’ in media studies (Nightingale, 2011)—have been developed to tackle them. But given the multiplicity of audiences and their internal diversity, engaging with performance reception would go far beyond the scope of this modest chapter.

Another important point to make is that, because of its emptiness without an ideological content, it is fundamental to state that populism will be expressed differently depending on the beliefs of its proponents. While the stylistic approach diverges from the ideational approach regarding the nature of populism itself, it agrees on this point with the ideational approach (Mudde, 2004): populism cannot stand on its own, as it only becomes visible when it shapes and is being shaped by ideological content. And just as content needs form to reach its audience, form remains shapeless until it meets content. It is precisely for this purpose that, in my application of the populist style to the perspective of global politics, I will distinguish between the two main forms of ideologies associated with populism: radical right, by which I mean a combination of nativism, conservatism and souverainism and the radical left, which incorporates socialism, ecological issues and other forms of progressive politics like feminism, antiracism and so on.

Although much more could be written about the application of each of these clusters on the global stage, I have chosen to dedicate the limited space of this chapter to the first cluster: performances of identity. As the heart of the populist style, performances of identity constitute the most

fundamental cluster of the repertoire. Furthermore, because these clusters operate in interaction with one another, there is a part of overlap that will be hinted at throughout the discussion. In the following three sections, I will interweave theoretical discussion on populist identity with its application to the political communication of populist leaders on an international level.

POPULIST PERFORMANCES OF IDENTITY

Performances of identity constitute the first and most fundamental performative cluster of populism. Identity is understood broadly as the social construction of what makes a group or individual distinctive from others. Inspired by poststructural understandings of the concept, notably Derrida (1978) and Butler (1990), I adopt an anti-essentialist stance on identity, which does not refer to a form of pre-existing essence that would intrinsically characterise someone or something. Instead, identity is understood as an unstable and relational concept that is “always spatially, temporally and ethically situated” (Hansen, 2013, p.33) as well as performatively constructed.

Because it is contingent and uncertain, identity is always characterised by *aporia* (Campbell, 1992, p.144), a state of doubt and emptiness, which implies an endless cycle of repeated performances that each seek to stabilise the identity without ever achieving this permanently. In addition to the importance of instability and repetition as “the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities” (Butler, 1990, p.42), the other fundamental aspect of the concept is its relationality. Indeed, the articulation of distinctive features of self inevitably involves the mirror articulation of another, which is contrastingly characterised by the absence of these features (Derrida, 1978). As such, identity is about drawing a boundary between what is self and what is not. Identity is hence ontologically produced through the simultaneous and complementary “processes of linking and differentiation” (Hansen, 2013, p.17) by linking disparate features into an apparently cohesive whole and differentiating oneself through the foil of the other(s) who do not share these characteristics.

The centrality of performance and performativity in this articulation of identity is reflected in the works of scholars like Schechner (2013, p.46) who described “marking or changing identity” as one of the fundamental functions of performance. Extending this notion to the realm of politics, this thus suggests that performing identity is arguably part of the

performative repertoire of every political actor. However, what makes populist performances of identity different from others is that they simultaneously constitute two interconnected forms of identities: on the one hand, they present politics as an antagonistic opposition between the people and the elite (Laclau, 2005); on the other hand, they ground this collective claim to represent the people into the embodied performance of an individual, the populist leader who must tread the delicate tightrope between performing ordinariness and extraordinariness (Moffitt, 2016, p.52).

Of course, these populist performances of identity are defined here very generally, but they are always adapted to the specific context of each individual case and are fleshed out in a diversity of ways by actors using the populist style as a medium for their political ideology. Whether it is the limits of ‘the people’, the choice of who is included in the antagonised elite or the myriad of ways a populist leader performs their own identity, populist performances of identity constitute a blueprint for politicians willing to embrace them. It is a generic template for framing one’s agenda through the antagonistic lens of a conflict between people and elite.

To develop visually the way populist performances of identity operate, I offer a schematic representation (Fig. 11.1) of the three co-constitutive elements performatively constructed in a populist performance: the people, the elite, and the leader, which constitute the “triad of populist representation” (Casullo, 2021, p.77). These elements are differentiated from one another depending on whether they rely on collective performances of identity coalescing a large group of individuals—like the elite and the people—or whether they are articulated as individual performances of self—as is the case for the identity of the populist leader. Furthermore, they are also separated depending on whether they rely on performing *commonality*—like performances of the people—*particularity*—like performances of the elite—or a *hybrid* combination of both—as is the case for the leader’s performances of self.

In this perspective, “the people” is articulated through collective performances of identity relying on commonality, emphasising common traits between members of the group. Placed in opposition and in an antagonistic relationship to the people, “the elite” is also constructed through collective performances of identity, but its articulation emphasises particularity, that is characteristics that set this group apart from the rest of society. People and elite in the populist framework are thus in tension, which is

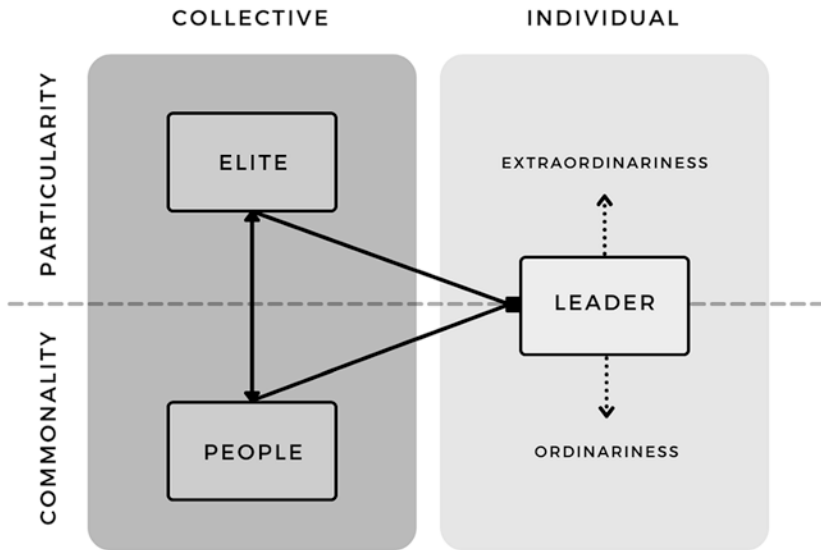


Fig. 11.1 Populist performances of identity

represented here with a double arrow, co-constituting each-other in reference to what the other is not.

The final element that ties the other two identity nodes together is the role of the leader whose performance of self is hybrid, combining and balancing references to commonality and particularity. This hybridity is produced because of the need for populist leaders to simultaneously show their proximity with the people that they claim to represent as well as extraordinary markers making them worthy leaders. In other words, they both need to show that they are ‘one of us’ through references to commonality, while justifying their leadership position by making the case for their own exceptionality. Doing too much of the former would destabilise their role as the centralising point of identification for the people. Doing too much of the latter would distance them from the people and associate them with the elite that they repudiate. This tension between ordinariness and extraordinariness (Moffitt, 2016, p.52) is also represented here by a double arrow and it justifies the position of the leader between references to commonality and particularity.

COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCES OF IDENTITY: THE PEOPLE AND THE ELITE

As stated above, the opposition between people and elite constitutes the most minimal feature of populism. Laclau (2005) described populism as the articulation of a dichotomic vision of society, through the “antagonistic frontier” that seeks to contest and reshape the current political hegemony. Through its construction as the point of convergence of unmet political demands, the people in populism is the locus where this unifying sense of commonality takes shape, offering a sovereign counter-narrative of obfuscated agency with which isolated and powerless individuals can identify to restore their power. Conversely, the elite is constituted as the focal collective of powerful individuals embodying what is wrong with the authoritative structures of the political system, the part of a democracy that does not function properly and should be changed. As such, the people and the elite are mutually co-constituted as collective entities that are exclusive to one-another, although they are deeply connected through a power asymmetry benefiting the elite at the expense of the people. But because these constructs remain hypothetical in this abstract form, they are concretely given shape through the performances of the political actor that fills these collective signifiers with both implicit and explicit meaning, which is what the following sections endeavour to do when applied to the global stage.

Performing the People on the Global Stage

At the international level, this triadic nature of populism is reflected in the political communication of national representatives embracing the role of populist leader. While the signifier of the people is mobilised within Domestic politics as a way to create a popular movement, whose crystallisation typically coincides with electoral outcomes, it holds a different role on an international stage. Indeed, mobilising the people in front of an audience of other national leaders—within intergovernmental organisations like the United Nations for instance—is a central tool to demonstrate one’s popular legitimacy. More than the liberal stance which sees one’s legitimacy determined by the solidity of the state’s democratic procedures, presenting oneself as the direct representative of the people—or even its embodiment—grants an elected official an additional layer of symbolic power. Pushed to the extreme, invoking the people may be used

strategically to circumvent foreign criticism of one's domestic policy or military actions, claiming to only be accountable to one's people and not to any international institution. One of the most recent examples of this can be found in Vladimir Putin's speech on 30 September 2022 about Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian regions. Ignoring international criticism of the blatant rigging of the referenda held in these regions, Putin used the word 'people' (*народ*) nearly forty times during his speech, claiming that the legitimacy of his annexation was grounded in "the will of the people" and that he would "do everything [he] can to ensure the safety of our people" (Putin, 2022).

Going back to the central role of ideology in shaping the content associated with 'the people', it is important to distinguish the way it is being understood and mobilised by radical right and left populist leaders on the international stage. On the radical right, the people is subsumed within the hegemonic signifier of the nation (Anastasiou, 2019), which circumscribes it within strict cultural or ethnic criteria. This exclusionary understanding of the people will be associated with *souverainism* and thus placed in opposition with federalist projects, seen as projects to dissolve the organic entity of the nation. This use of the people is notably at the heart of the Euroscepticism of radical right parties within the European Union (EU), used to frame the national people as endangered by rootless institutions that weaken their identity and—worse than that—leave them open to the threat of 'mass immigration'. The most effective use of this rhetoric can be found in the 'Leave' campaign of the Brexit referendum in 2016, particularly in the words of Nigel Farage, the leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). Throughout the campaign, Farage lambasted "the open-door, mass immigration [caused by] EU membership" and claimed victory in the name of "ordinary people, decent people" (Shirbon, 2016).

In contrast with this instrumental use of the people to close them off from foreign influences, the radical left's understanding of the people is not limited by ethno-cultural criteria but understood in an inclusive and open way. For a leader mobilising a socialist or even communist agenda, the people may serve as a locus and synonym with the working class. While it can be limited to a protectionist defence of the most impoverished classes against liberal *laissez-faire*, it may also be extended to become an international project of defending the poorest beyond the borders of one's country. As such, invoking a form of transnational people can be a powerful argument to justify one's opposition to free trade agreements by

claiming to not only defend the interest of one's nation but also more broadly the people of multiple countries. This was precisely the mission statement of the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25) which has been discussed as one of the first cases of a genuinely transnational form of populism (de Cleen et al., 2019). Adopting the cause of ecology, which is a global struggle, can even extend this to a global dimension, as will be discussed in the conclusion of this chapter.

Performing the Elite on the Global Stage

When it comes to the second dimension of populist performances of identity, the mirror articulation of an antagonism against the elite, it also serves multiple purposes in the political communication of a state representative. Just as in the national scale, alluding to an elite allows one's rhetoric to have a target it also creates a form of embodiment for the opposition to one's political agenda. Even when the boundaries of such an elite remain blurry, it fleshes out the agonistic nature of a political struggle (Mouffe, 2013) by pointing at an adversary impeding progress. As is best expressed through the concept of transgression, which constitutes another fundamental feature of the populist style (Aiolfi, 2022), this anti-establishment facet of populist communication can also be used as a tool to dissociate oneself from other national representatives, granting oneself a form of moral high ground by creating a divide with the rest of the international elite.

In the case of this collective performance as well, the ideological content of one's agenda profoundly shapes the use of this anti-elitism. For radical-left leaders adopting populism, the elite typically matches with the economic elite, which corresponds to the Marxist *bourgeoisie*. Whether it is called the 'oligarchy', the 'one percent' or simply 'the rich', framing the wealthiest individuals as part of a transnational elite playing by a set of different rules than the people can flesh out the international struggle against tax evasion, or more generally against economic inequalities. Gallagher (2016) for instance connected the lasting power of the movement Occupy Wall Street in 2011 with the success of the campaign of Bernie Sanders for the Democratic nomination, among many other radical left political actors who mobilised this rhetoric to fight against extreme economic inequality.

However, if it is pushed to the extreme, invoking an elite that controls or even manipulates the people, such a rhetorical tool begins to be associated with conspiracy theories. Subotic (2022) for instance showed the

discursive proximity of antisemitism with the anti-elite component of populism, as well as the potential for expressions like ‘the banks’ or ‘the financial elites’ to be latently imbued with antisemitic tropes and thus used as a form of dog-whistling. While she primarily focuses on far-right manifestations of this phenomenon, Subotic (2022, p.470) warns in her conclusion that framing the wealthiest as the elite might risk conflation with antisemitism even on radical left forms of populism.

As was stated, this very pitfall is even more pronounced for radical right mobilisations of the elite because of the xenophobic roots of their ideology. In their case, this anti-elitism is used as a rhetorical justification of their scepticism, or even open contempt, for international institutions. Although such scepticism may also be present for radical left forms of populism, it is less central and more of a corollary of the rejection of economic liberalism. On the radical right, international institutions are not merely framed as benefitting the wealthiest, as they could be in left-wing rhetoric, they are criticised at their very core because of their control by a political elite composed of stateless individuals who committed the cardinal sin of abandoning the fight for their nation. An anti-elitist rhetoric could thus provide the justification for transgressive practices (Aiolfi, 2022), legitimising a form of withdrawal from the international order. The key illustration of this is Trump’s rejection of multilateralism as he made the United States leave the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2017, the Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2018, and started the process to leave the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020. In Europe, Orban used a similar rhetoric to frame Hungary’s steady democratic backsliding as a return to national sovereignty against ‘illegitimate’ or even ‘undemocratic’ rules imposed by a technocratic elite from the EU.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES OF IDENTITY: THE POPULIST LEADER

In Laclauian terms, the people and the elite are ‘empty signifiers’, they do not hold a specific meaning until their performative articulation through the embodied performance of an individual. But because identity is relational, political actors themselves are shaped in return through their mobilisation of the populist style, meaning that their very identity as populist leader is simultaneously co-constituted in the performative process.

To paraphrase De Beauvoir (1986) through Butler's reading of performativity: one is not born a populist leader, but rather becomes one.

Indeed, in the process of articulating the antagonism between the people against the elite, a political actor is much more than an outsider merely acknowledging political facts, although they might claim or even genuinely believe that they are. Instead, they also perform their own identity as both a part and the voice of the people on behalf of which they speak. Furthermore, although populism is characterised by a representative claim *vis-à-vis* the people (Saward, 2010), it is not built on accurately reflecting the character of the people, what Diehl (2017) called "mirror representation". Instead, their representative claim could be better described as "synecdochal representation" (Casullo, 2021, p.8). A synecdoche is a rhetorical device whereby a part is used to describe a totality. By extension, this form of representation implies strategically performing a part of one's identity to represent the whole constituency, but also emphasising one's differences from the represented. In other words, they must perform *commonality* with the people on some level, but also *particularity* to justify their own exceptionality as aspiring leaders.

Populist Performances of Self on the Global Stage

When taking this discussion to the international level, the most noticeable element is that the global stage serves as an ideal backdrop for aspiring populist leaders to perform their extraordinariness. Indeed, in contrast with domestic appearances alongside 'ordinary people'—for instance in a bar or in a remote village—opportunities to appear alongside other state leaders are perfect to showcase one's importance and prove one's claim to be a fitting representative of the people. As such, international conferences and similar events thus provide a useful way to bring balance to one's "synecdochal representation" of the people. Characterised by their formality and rigid ceremonialism, the regular meetings hosted by intergovernmental organisations—like the United Nations General Assembly, the G7 or G20 summits or the European Council meetings, constitute a predictable opportunity to stage one's international importance for the domestic audience. Although they cannot be anticipated to the same extent, extraordinary meetings of heads of states in times of crisis hold even more symbolic power at a time of extraordinary need. Not only do they demonstrate the importance of the country in impacting international affairs, they can also be used as a way for representatives adopting

the populist style to establish their credentials in managing a critical situation requiring urgent action, which echoes the populist reliance on performances of crisis (Moffitt, 2015).

One of the most impressive examples of the impact an existential crisis can have on the performance of self is that Volodymyr Zelensky, elected president of Ukraine in 2019. While he rose to fame through the television show *Servant of the People* (*Слуга народу*) in 2015 with an image of ordinariness and proximity to the people that he fully embraced by creating a party with a similar name as his show, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 forced him to adopt an entirely new role: that of the war leader. Through multiple addresses to the European Union, the United Nations and many others, Zelensky mobilised the international stage as a way to not only urge other countries to support Ukraine but also to reinforce his image as an extraordinary leader. This allowed him to turn himself into a heroic figure that would unite the Ukrainian people as well as silence any domestic opposition to his policies (Martín, 2022).

However, it is interesting to note that the international stage can also be used for the exact opposite purpose: as an opportunity to perform ordinariness. Precisely because of the expected formality of events in intergovernmental settings, which require a level of uniformity in the way to dress and behave, there is powerful transgressive power in breaking these cultural norms. Indeed, foregoing the traditional suit that represents a form of Western imperialism, choosing to wear traditional garments has been a way to both stand out and represent the identity of one's people. From Muammar Gaddafi in 2009 to Evo Morales in 2018, the United Nations General Assembly has been the repeated theatre of such types of performances mobilising what Ostiguy (2017) called "the 'from here'", an emphasis on local belonging to show one's proximity with the people. He also coined a complementary way to perform ordinariness on the global stage: "the culturally popular", which refers to the use of behaviours associated with the popular class, like the use of a familiar or even vulgar vocabulary in front of an international audience. Among the archetypical examples of this, one could consider the case of US President Donald Trump who referred to North Korea's Supreme Leader, Kim Jong Un, as "rocket man" in 2017, in defiance of his willingness to use nuclear missiles. A second demonstration of this instrumental use of vulgarity is the case of Rodrigo Duterte, then president of the Philippines, who insulted his American counterpart Barack Obama by calling him a "son of a whore" in 2016.

This latter example of a misogynistic insult allows me to briefly mention the lens of gender which also allows for a rich analysis of populist performances of self-identity and of the leader's own body. Geva (2020, p.7) argued that populism is a "gendered performative style structured by hegemonic masculinity and femininity". According to her, this explains the reason why male leaders express through populism their hyper-masculinity, making for instance references to their sexual prowess or their physical aptitudes. Conversely, female leaders adopting populism portray what Mason (2010, p.190) called a "frontier femininity", a combination of traits associated with hegemonic masculinity (like strength, toughness, etc.) with others associated with hegemonic femininity (like empathy, caring, etc.).

On the international stage, the gender of the populist performer also has an impact on their performance of self. The aforementioned examples of Trump and Duterte show that hegemonic masculinity can be mobilised in a vulgar way by male politicians to appear more authentic through their transgression of political correctness. However, it can also be utilised by female politicians using the opportunity of international speeches to demonstrate their extraordinariness by appearing as serious and powerful as their male counterparts. Conversely, female politicians may use the codes of hegemonic femininity to appear different from other politicians through colourful clothing or visible make-up. A unique combination of these strategies can be found in the international appearances of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner during her term as president of Argentina. From her impassionate pleas in favour of multilateralism at the United Nations where Fernández de Kirchner never shied away from adopting the codes of femininity in her attire to the more subdued homage to the working class during the Expo 2015 World's Fair in Milan (Sheinin, 2023), her mobilisation of populism followed the footsteps of Eva Perón in mobilising a subtle combination of exacerbated femininity and masculine symbols. The strategic use of femininity by male politicians to perform extraordinariness is less common, which can be accounted for by considering the association between power and masculinity (Jansens, 2019), but one could envision the mobilisation of a caring image to appear more well-rounded than other typically masculine colleagues.

Whether the global stage is used as a place to perform extraordinariness or ordinariness, to show distance or proximity from the people, the performances' audience is twofold. Firstly, these types of performances are aimed at a domestic audience, at the people being represented by the

populist leader, in order to perpetuate or alter their self-representation at home. Secondly, these performances of self are also aimed at an international audience, primarily the other heads of states who will be the direct witness of the performances. This tension between domestic and international audiences makes these public opportunities to appear under the global spotlight particularly precious and important to state leaders embracing the populist image, as their very legitimacy as populist leader relies on the reception of these performances.

CONCLUSION

Even after having examined only one of the three clusters of the populist style, what emerges from this chapter is that populism shapes the political communication of national representatives adopting the style in a rich array of ways. Populism may have a powerful impact on their communication, offering a set of intuitive tools to appear more authentic, distinguish oneself from the others, or even offer a more appealing way to present one's agenda.

However, it is important to introduce a reminder that looking at populism alone is a pointless endeavour. One of the key elements which the stylistic approach stresses is the need for populism to be situated within a specific context: the socio-cultural background of every performance, the ideological agenda articulated through populism, the institutional context within which it takes place, the idiosyncrasies of each performer, and—as was the focus of this chapter—the scale of the stage where populism is set in motion. Indeed, this discussion proved that populism is not only a domestic phenomenon limited to the national stage of electoral politics, it also has international and even global resonance. Indeed, populism simultaneously takes place across multiple levels, and they all need to be accounted for in order to get a holistic perspective of how populism builds its appeal.

The final point which I would like to go back to is that this chapter only focused on national representatives, that is political actors elected in domestic elections for whom the international stage constitutes a different space where they need to adjust their political communication, but which also provides an opportunity to appear in a different light. But while populism relies on embodied performances, this does not necessarily mean that they need to be associated with the context of electoral politics on a domestic scale. A challenge for the IR scholarship addressing populism is

the rise of a new generation of political actors that embody not merely a national form of populism but a transnational or even global one.

One of the most thought-provoking examples of that is the case of Greta Thunberg, a young schoolgirl as well as an environmental activist who made a remarkable entrance in global politics through her performance at the UN's Climate Action Summit in 2019. Schmidt (2021) demonstrated that her political communication mobilised the codes of populism in order to performatively articulate a global people failed by the unresponsive elite of world leaders apathetic in the face of the ongoing climate crisis. Her example demonstrates that populism can be articulated by an individual that is far from the stereotypes of the charismatic head of state ruling over a personalistic party. It proves that populism is far from having said its last words on the global stage and encourages the literature connecting populism with IR to be open to the unexpected forms it may take.

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Populist Bullshit in International Politics

Gustav Meibauer

Trudeau came to see me. He's a good guy, Justin. He said, 'No, no, we have no trade deficit with you, we have none. Donald, please' [...] I said, 'Wrong, Justin, you do.' I didn't even know. [...] I had no idea. I just said, 'You're wrong.'

– Former President Donald Trump, describing a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, during a fundraiser in March 2018 (Dawsey et al., 2018)

The ways in which the 'new' populists, particularly in North America and Europe (Trump, Johnson, Orban, Le Pen, Melenchon, Storch, etc.), performed their political agendas have led to a plethora of contributions on the advent of 'post-truth' politics (for reviews, see: Foroughi et al., 2019; Sengul, 2019). Underscored by the liberal use of terms like 'fake' and 'alternative facts' by populists themselves, observers suggested that the relative electoral success of these populists was fuelled by, and in turn

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fuelled, a decline of the value and relevance of ‘truth’—or perhaps better, a decline of the political importance of generally agreed factual accuracy. The ‘post-truth’ era was instead characterized by intense polarization, increasingly digital ways to communicate politically (bypassing traditional media and its gatekeepers) and informational ‘bubbles’, personalization and the rise of the ‘politainer’, declining trust in state and societal institutions—all of which combined to favour a disregard for truthful communication, and a rise in transgressive and deceitful speech.

While much of the ‘post-truth’ literature has taken particular forms of communication as a starting point, it has tended to quickly move ahead—seeking instead more general insights about the state of democracy, Western and/or societal decline, globalization and digitization, and so forth. In so doing, it often failed to take seriously the specific speech acts, discursive interventions, and so on that are constitutive of a ‘post-truth’ environment. Where it has done so, it usually focused on domestic political contestation (e.g. Lakoff, 2017; Montgomery, 2017). While ‘post-truth’ may be a suitable backdrop, then, it is in the growing literature on political bullshit and its intersections with populism that I find a more useful starting point to interrogate the intersections between populist communication and international politics.

Below, I show how bullshit connects with populism via transgression, heightened partisanship, authenticity and the use of empty signifiers. Given this affinity between populism and bullshit, it may be curious that the interlinkages of populist bullshit and international politics have so far remained understudied. In a second part, I map out these interlinkages as well as the potential knowledge future research on them may generate, with a focus on the effects of populist bullshit on foreign policy, international practices, and international outcomes. Finally, I briefly discuss the difficulty of countering international populist bullshit, and end on the limitations researchers may encounter in investigating the phenomenon.

BULLSHIT, POPULISM AND POPULIST BULLSHIT

Following Frankfurt (2005), ‘bullshit’ describes communication characterized by a loose connection to truth: ‘[The bullshitter’s] statement is grounded neither in a belief that it is true nor, as a lie must be, in a belief that it is not true. It is just this lack of connection to a concern with the truth - this indifference to how things really are - that I regard as of the essence of bullshit’ (Frankfurt, 2005, pp. 33–34). The bullshitter simply

does not care too much whether what they are saying matches with objective reality, which differentiates this type of speech from lying as well as hypocrisy (Petrocelli, 2018; Saul, 2012; Stokke, 2018a). The speaker does, however, care that this inattention to truth is not known to the audience (Meibauer, 2016, p. 71).

Bullshitters say what they believe is necessary to persuade, manipulate or impress their audiences, evade accountability, and obscure their ulterior motives and/or lack of factual knowledge. Bullshitting is thus conventionally understood as a deliberate, deceptive communication strategy. It is connected to an intention to deceive on the part of the speaker, namely, to misrepresent their statement's truthfulness. The speaker's performance 'must maintain the pretense of conveying information, hiding his lack of justification for this information from the audience, and perhaps even from himself' (Seymour, 2014, 573). Bullshitting is about creating the right impression rather than persuasion or argumentative exchange. Its function is therefore likely to lie in an attempt to further their political or personal agenda (Foroughi et al., 2019; Meibauer, 2020).

To clarify its form, some previous authors have sought to categorize different types of bullshit by domain (e.g. academic bullshit, business bullshit, political bullshit). Others have focused on distinctions related to the underlying intentional characteristic of bullshit (as it describes the relationship between context, speaker, and audience). 'Evasive bullshit' (as opposed to 'persuasive bullshit', Littrell et al., 2021) is a prime example, especially when coercively prompted or otherwise expected to provide an opinion on an issue which they may not want to address (e.g. because they do not know enough about it), speakers are incentivized to evade answering truthfully by bullshitting their way through (Carson, 2010, p. 60; Petrocelli, 2018). Pennycook et al. (2015) focus on 'pseudo-profound bullshit', as a collection of pompous words that have syntactical structure (they look/sound like functional sentences) but no actual meaning. Closely related, Meibauer (2020) suggests the political value of 'hyper-specific bullshit', that hides its emptiness not behind vacuous profundity but overly detailed terminology.

Finally, to differentiate bullshit from other speech acts (e.g. lies, truth-telling), some authors have suggested the category of 'bald-faced bullshitting' in which the speaker deliberately asserts falsehoods but may not actually intend to deceive their audience (Carson, 2006; Stokke, 2018b). This category rests on a twist to Frankfurt's definition provided above, which is aimed at rendering it both more precise and more easily

operationalizable: Fallis and Stokke (2017, p. 279) suggest bullshit rests not so much on the speakers' indifference to truth as much as their indifference to *genuine inquiry* (contributing to the process of discovery about how things truly are, how the world is actually like). The bullshitter in general, and the bald-faced bullshitter in particular, then simply do not care whether their assertion is true or false as regards the issue at hand.

In much of the empirical scholarship on bullshit (not to be confused with bullshit scholarship), we see three different foci: one, on bullshit producers, that is, their use of bullshit, motivation, personality, style, and success. For example, Petrocelli (2018) shows that bullshit is more likely when a speaker must provide an opinion and feels they can get away with bullshitting easier. Littrell et al. (2020) suggest that people who engage in bullshitting also overclaim more, are less honest and sincere in general, and tend to have lower-than-average cognitive ability. Two, on bullshit amplifiers (e.g. the role of traditional and digital media; MacKenzie & Bhatt, 2020). Three, more recently, on an individual's propensity to believe, ascribe meaning to, and indeed act on bullshit (for a review, see Iacobucci & de Cicco, 2022).

Across these three focal points, in what ways are populism and bullshit conceptually linked? Borrowing from this volume's introductory chapter, I define *populism* as a set of interlocking discourses in politics, media and society constructed around a central political antagonism, a grand clash between the idealized will of an imaginary 'true people' and an evil, corrupt 'elite'. On behalf of the 'true people', populists challenge the status quo and promise a new political order that resonates with their longings and aspirations (Rooduijn, 2014). They supposedly give voice to otherwise unspoken—or ignored—calls for morality, authenticity, and responsiveness. To do so, populists embrace particular styles of communication (see Aiolfi in this volume). They lend political significance to those narratives, symbols, and myths that serve their electoral goals and resonate with voters, often at an emotional level, for example, by evoking nostalgia for an imagined past (Kinnvall, 2018; Homolar & Löffmann, in this volume). This may concern rhetoric, interlocution, terminology, slang, pronunciation, and discursive performance. For example, populists are often argued to use a rhetorical style that is direct, intimate, simple, indelicate, and aggressive (Bischof & Senninger, 2018; Moffitt, 2016; Skonieczny & Boggio, in this volume). This shared 'low style' disrupts elite norms of political behaviour, and signals a challenge to the status quo (Moffitt &

Tormey, 2014). It may make populists appear different and authentic (Lacatus & Meibauer, 2022).

Concurrently, populists are often characterized as deceptive communicators both in style (e.g. alleging simplicity where there is none) and in content (e.g. intentionally mischaracterizing policy problems). This makes them prime candidates for the production of political bullshit. Following Green (2019), I zoom in on four aspects of populist bullshit: (1) populist bullshit as partisan transgression, (2) populist bullshit as a marker of authenticity, (3) populist bullshit as entertainment, (4) populist bullshit as an empty signifier.

Firstly, just as other politicians, populists may bullshit because they can—specifically, because the likelihood of their detection is low. Unlike other politicians, this is not solely due to their bullshitting skill, or the lack of epistemic awareness in their audiences that hinders detection, but also because of the particular trust lent to them by their supporters. Directly related to research on bullshit amplifiers and the wider societal and informational conditions that make bullshitting likely and likely successful, supporters may find themselves in polarized, partisan, and sealed-off bubbles. In such bubbles, contrasting information and alternative viewpoints do not feature. In assessing whether a populist's statement is truthful, then, supporters may base their assessment on in-group credentials rather than the statement's accuracy or plausibility. What Trump or Bolsonaro say is judged to be true by their supporters (or at least truthful) by virtue of them saying it, not by any particular characteristic of what they say.

More so, given that populists position their in-groups ('the people') against a corrupt and (almost by definition) lying opponent ('the elite') in stark and antagonistic terms, any statement from within the in-group is more likely true, or at least truthful, than false. Any pushback against ostensibly false statements thus turns into proof of an antagonistic elite out to suppress the in-group and its leader. Indeed, the more (exasperated or angry) political opponents seek to 'cut through' the populist's bullshit, the quicker the populist produces new bullshit to further the in-group's sense of partisan togetherness in the face of an unfair political onslaught.

While this may explain the extent to which even bald-faced bullshit (and lies) do not 'burst the bubble' of populist support, it remains somewhat unclear why the populist leader would be judged as part of the in-group in the first place. This is particularly pertinent in cases like Trump or Johnson, who are evidently wealthy, educated elites themselves. One reason may be found in the way populist politics overlap with other

characteristics of supporters that make them more receptive to bullshit. Bullshit receptivity has been linked to, for example: general gullibility and credulity, conspiracy beliefs, religious beliefs, esoteric beliefs, beliefs in the free market and faith in intuition, and political conservatism (Iacobucci & de Cicco, 2022, p. 30). There may also be a left-right divide, with right-wing populists able to appeal to supposed business success or strongman leadership in lieu of a social background that marks them as in-group members.

Alternatively, *secondly*, the way populists employ bullshit may serve to produce their trustworthiness in the first place. Bullshit becomes a core way in which the populist leader's authenticity is communicated, which in turn underpins much of populism's electoral attractiveness (Lacatus & Meibauer, 2022). At the core of populism is the populist's alleged connection and proximity to the 'authentic' people, which they claim to represent against the 'fake' elite. This is translated into populist communication both at the level of content (i.e. the 'true people's' concerns) and style (including rhetoric as well as dress or mannerisms); (Green, 2019). Populist rhetoric often aims at 'speaking like the people' (Bischof & Senninger, 2018; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). While notable stylistic differences persist due to, for example, personal preferences and abilities, cultural contexts, societal norms, or party-political positions (McDonnell & Ondelli, 2020), this shared 'low style' aims to disrupt elite norms of political behaviour and challenge the status quo (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014).

In particular, flaunting rules of political communication through a lack of decorum, bad manners and combative 'low politics' makes populists appear different and 'authentic' (Montgomery, 2017). Authenticity is not the same as honesty or integrity; it does not require telling an objective truth or adhering to good principles (Jones, 2016, pp. 491–92). Authenticity invokes (successful claims to) 'speaking one's mind', that is, presenting one's identity, principles and ideas transparently, and committing to them consistently (Stiers et al., 2019, p. 7). Authenticity therefore does not relate to 'truth' as much as to sincerity, of which it is a subset focusing on the accurate and transparent representation of beliefs that define the self. In turn, the opposite of authenticity is 'fake-ness', that is, deception about one's self (Jones, 2016, pp. 496; Stiers et al., 2019, pp. 3–5). Fake-ness is, by populist definition, a key characteristic of the 'elite', regardless of factual accuracy. Populist communication therefore embraces authenticity, not accuracy, which makes it a prime candidate for bullshit. This may explain that populists who bullshit not only do not

suffer electorally but are also lauded by their core supporters for their authentic sincerity. Again, this may be reflected in populist supporters and their relative bullshit receptivity. For example, Green (2019) suggests that it may relate to a conception of ‘truth’ that emphasizes sincere communication of one’s thoughts and feelings rather than truthful representation of the world.

Thirdly, beyond partisan transgression and authenticity, populist bullshit may be used to entertain, which is part of its appeal to supporters (as well as mediators and outside observers). That bullshit can be used for humour and enjoyment in particular social settings, for example, in ‘bull sessions’ or during a ‘bullshit bingo’, has already been observed in Frankfurt (2005). This humour is often derived from an insider effect, in which a select, epistemically aware group finds enjoyment in seeing through otherwise cleverly disguised bullshit. It is here that populist bullshit may overlap with ‘trolling’. Trolling, both as an online and offline phenomenon, aims primarily at emotional outrage in a target ‘outsider’ audience and mobilization or enjoyment in a shared ‘insider’ audience. In so doing, the troll is usually disinterested in whether what they say contributes to genuine inquiry—although they will carefully disguise this, and in fact claim the opposite to appear ‘disinterested’, not emotionally involved and incorruptible (Lieback, 2019). Right-wing populists in particular have embraced ‘trolling’ in domestic settings, and developed ever more aggressive variants (‘melting snowflakes’, ‘owning the libs’, etc.). The entertainment factor inherent in populist bullshit, and the outrage it may generate in its outside targets, makes it attractive to consume, report and share via online and traditional media (both positively by the in-group and negatively by the out-group), which further serves to make it an attractive political communication strategy.

Fourthly, bullshit may also be used to hint at, rather than specify, populist ideas. To be politically effective, populists need to highlight the wider, Manichean confrontation between the ‘true people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’ all the while avoiding any specification of these groups and their conflict (Laclau, 2005, pp. 39–40). To that end, Laclau argues, they employ ‘empty signifiers’, indeterminate terms open to redefinition and fillable with whatever positions interlocutors may think or wish are at stake (Laclau, 2005, pp. 40–41). Empty signifiers allow populists to implicitly reference or hint at wider ideas and positions than those actually expressed. Green (2019, p. 12) argues that ‘populism’s success in attracting and mobilizing adherents is dependent on the successful conveyance of much

information which is not, and perhaps cannot successfully be, explicitly expressed'. On the one hand, this relates to 'dog-whistling' (Bonikowski & Zhang, 2023). Here, populist bullshit intentionally alludes to (rather than outright states) underlying ideas, for example, through the use of symbols, code words, analogies or similes, which are known to an epistemically aware audience, predominantly for the purpose of plausible deniability. This is evident in particular on the populist far-right, where leaders such as Trump, Bolsonaro or Orban have tied anti-elite discourses to virulent ethno-nationalism all the while they (at least initially) hedged against public censure through ambiguity and vagueness.

More generally, the populist bullshitter may simply not be interested in the factual accuracy or specific content of any one statement. Rather, it is then about the sentiment, idea or supposedly underlying truth it may convey. For this, populists may employ a vast variety of vague, blurry, vacuous and ambiguous signifiers. American comedian Stephen Colbert famously coined the term 'truthiness' for this phenomenon. Again, the way in which media are willing to report such communication, and indeed desperately attempt to fact-check them, ignores this function of populist bullshit. In turn, populist supporters are often used to, and indeed eager to, read into populist communication underlying implications and meanings (an ability also suggested by bullshit receptivity research).

The above discussion is suggestive of a particular and distinct link between populist communication and bullshit. Empirical examples of bullshit, especially produced by more bald-faced bullshitters like Trump, Bolsonaro or Johnson, have provided ample illustration of the particular *domestic* political dynamics incentivizing bullshit production and amplification, as well as supporting bullshit receptivity; though clearly further specification of causal mechanisms and additional empirical support is desirable. Previous research has curiously overlooked the international political dynamics of populist bullshit, however. In the following, I map out a research agenda on international populist bullshit.

POPULIST BULLSHIT IN FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Given this likely affinity between populism and bullshit production, it is surprising, both from the vantage points of populism research as well as from that of the discipline of International Relations, that populist bullshit

has not caught much scholarly attention. I detail in the below how populist bullshit intersects with the foreign policy conduct of leaders abroad, and how it affects international processes and outcomes.

Populist Bullshit and Foreign Policy Conduct

The way in which populists leverage international political issues for domestic political (electoral) gain likely affects how they conduct themselves abroad—either as incumbents (like Trump, Johnson, Orban, or Chavez) or as political movements with influence on the foreign policy direction chosen by more mainstream parties (whether as coalition members or as influential opposition). This interlinks the study of populist bullshit in terms of political communication with the study of populist foreign policy. For mainstream and populist politicians alike as well as across the political spectrum, speaking on foreign policy issues may incentivize political bullshit due to a combination of inherent complexity and lack of knowledge and interest in voters. The former increases the likelihood that politicians cannot speak knowledgeably about foreign affairs. Where they still have to do so, for example when coercively prompted in a televised debate, politicians may evade answering truthfully, for example, by bullshitting their way through (Carson, 2010, p. 60). They may opt for either vacuous, ambiguous or alternatively hyper-specific statements to cloud their lack of expertise (Meibauer, 2020). Voters' lack of knowledge about and interest in foreign affairs in turn increases the bullshitter's chances of getting away with it, which may make bullshitting an even more attractive political strategy.

Concurrently, international political issues often play an outsized role in populist mobilization. This is evident across the political spectrum: while right-wing populists focus on immigration, terrorism, or supposed threats to national sovereignty from international organizations, left-wing populists mobilize against free trade, multinational corporations or a more generally exploitative neoliberal international order. This connection alone might suggest that populists are more likely than other politicians to bullshit their way through the foreign policy part of both their electoral campaigns and their time in office.

In addition, specific trends previously observed in terms of populist foreign policy overlap with those observed above that make populist bullshit likely. Populist incumbents face a particular challenge: the need to both consistently and authentically narrate the struggle between people

and elite while also demonstrating at least some success in overcoming the deficits they pointed out in the first place (Lacatus & Meibauer, 2022). While populist narratives are powerful, and heightened partisanship can overcome some of the needs for factual results, populist incumbents are not usually immune to electoral punishment in case of policy failure (unless they have managed to reshape domestic institutions in their favour, like Orban in Hungary or, to a lesser extent, PiS in Poland). However, attaining international outcomes may often only be possible by competence, factual expertise, careful diplomacy, working with international partners, compromising, and so on, in short, following rules rather than breaking them. This presents a strategic dilemma for populist incumbents that increases the likelihood of bullshit—as may be evinced by the Trudeau example provided above. In response, some populists have shown a willingness to adapt to changing circumstance or necessity, especially when their domestic electoral changes are threatened. Verbeek & Coticchia's chapter in this volume suggests that Russia's invasion of Ukraine might be a case in point: Right-wing populist leaders in power seek to downplay their previous association with the Putin regime via a rhetorical strategy of ambiguity and obfuscation. Söderbaum et al. (2021) have shown that some populist incumbents are willing to cooperate with international organizations and partners if they assess such cooperation to be beneficial to their political survival. Again, they may seek to rhetorically cloud inconsistencies between previous political rhetoric and actual political behaviour in office via populist bullshit aimed predominantly at domestic audiences.

Destradi and Plagemann (2019) suggest that populist foreign policy is likely to be personalized because of the important role the leader plays in populist conceptions of the struggle between people and elite. Concurrently, the types of values such leaders may seek to embody, while partially dependent on the 'thick' ideology their populism attaches to—for example, specific images of masculinity as in Trump's supposed toughness or the caudillo populism of Latin and South American populist leaders—require a consistent focus on image, impression, and performance that may make bullshit on international politics, and on the international arena, likely. Moon (2019) argues that Trump (and other populists) profit from the cultural influence of a particular type of political leaders, the 'politainer'. These populists transpose a domestic electoral strategy (i.e. the populist 'low style') to international interactions, either strategically in search of consistency or because they cannot help themselves. In turn, this may change how international interactions play out, as partners and

adversaries are forced to react and adapt. They may push back and seek to retain business-as-usual under the radar of populist leaders, for example in institutionalized dialogues between the US and EU, play out (see Blanc's chapter in this volume). Alternatively, they may play along—international politics may become bullshit politics, such as in Trump's highly publicized summitry diplomacy with North Korea.

Populist Bullshit and International Outcomes

How populists use bullshit is likely to affect, either immediately or in the longer term, international outcomes. The functioning of international institutions often hinges on a basic assumption that speakers and participants care about the content (more specifically, the accuracy) of what they say. This is most evident in the case of diplomacy, whether in summitry or everyday processes of interaction (Özdan, 2020; Blanc in this volume; Destradi et al. in this volume). The penchant for personalized politics diagnosed above, combined with the likelihood of populist bullshit (whether evasive or primarily for domestic consumption, or both), is likely to affect, for example, relations between the US, Mexico, and Canada; or between the US and its European partners (Löfflmann, 2019; Skonieczny, 2018). In turn, a state's adversaries may be empowered by what they may perceive as ambiguous or unclear commitments—for example seeking to exploit Trump's vacuous pronouncements on NATO or the Brexit campaign's rhetoric vis-à-vis the EU for their own international gain.

These effects are likely to occur directly, for example, at the interpersonal level as well as the institutional level. The former relates to, for example, a decline in trust in, or willingness to rely on, Trump personally as an interlocutor for trade negotiations going forward. The latter involves, for example, a wider unwillingness to interact with the Trump administration not solely because of divergence in political viewpoints, but because their political communication remains vacuous and deceptive as to underlying intent. Note that these effects are likely to occur regardless of whether the specific interlocutor is actually the intended recipient/consumer of the produced bullshit, that is, even if the populist's bullshit in international contexts is meant primarily for domestic consumption. Particularly at the interpersonal level, the effect may go beyond annoyance and distrust. Fredal (2011) argues that being exposed to bullshit (especially of the bald-faced kind) carries an affective element that goes beyond mere impoliteness or transgression: that the speaker expresses disregard of

the interlocutor (this is true in the sense that international populist bullshit is usually not *about* the interlocutor—it is meant for domestic political consumption). This is because being exposed to (bald-faced) bullshit is surprising, especially in situations like high-level summitry where one might not expect it, and often occurs in encounters with asymmetrical power relations (Fredal, 2011, p. 254).

The effects of populist bullshit on international politics may also, over the longer term, occur even more indirectly—that is, through mediate and longer-term effects on processes of international politics which it disrupts. For example, Trump administration officials have to invest considerable amounts of time to interpret, explain, and reassure international partners not only in high-level discussions, but also in everyday interactions such as US-EU dialogues (see Blanc in this volume). This likely affects, on the one hand, how effectively populist-led states can employ their influence and power abroad. On the other, its repercussions may be felt at the level of international order(ing), for example, in terms of undermining the proper functioning of international organizations such as the World Trade Organization or the World Health Organization, or in terms of slowly changing the rules of international political communication (akin to how populist communication may affect rules of debate in domestic politics). This is partially intentional—populists set out to do this, and populist bullshit may be a way to achieve it.¹ Of course, sustained populist bullshit in international interactions may make successful outcomes less likely. To the extent populist political success hinges on (the semblance of) such success, this can force populists to compromise on occasion (Söderbaum et al., 2021).

Finally, focusing on international populist bullshit may also lead to focussing on its amplifiers and receivers, as well as counter-bullshit strategies. Who may be likely to fall for populist bullshit in the international arena? What strategies exist to manage it? Different leaders, states, and organizations have attempted different strategies, the relative successes of which are worth studying. For example, some international interlocutors have chosen to take Trump's, Johnson's or Bolsonaro's utterances around issues as diverse as terrorism, global health management or Brexit

¹ Bullshit could also serve a strategic role disconnected from domestic political incentives, akin to the way in which rhetorical ambiguity can serve a strategic purpose internationally. The Trump administration justified some of its international bullshit by reference to such a “madman theory” of unpredictability.

negotiations as serious policy positions—quickly finding that only some were ever followed up, while others aimed solely at domestic political consumption and impression management. Others have sought to downplay, or even ridicule, their populist counterparts—at times gaining admiration or understanding (visually expressed by the photo of a reticent, seated Trump sternly talked to by a gaggle of exasperated leaders standing around him), and at other times reinforcing the sense that the populist leader was indeed fighting against a unitary international elite opposed to their political success. In turn, trying to pierce through populist bullshit, for example, by explaining facts or setting things right (like Trudeau tries to in the above example), runs into two common problems: one, that their immediate interlocutor is not actually the intended audience for much of the bullshit populists produce internationally. It is not surprising that Trump recounts his interaction with Trudeau at a rally in Missouri. Trump is not actually interested in a discursive exchange about trade deficits with Trudeau. He is interested in performing the particular type of populist leadership he has identified as popular with his supporters. Two, trying to fight international populist bullshit runs into the bullshit asymmetry principle: fact-checking bullshit is more intensive in energy and time than producing new bullshit, which the unfazed bullshitter is happy to do (Iacobucci & de Cicco, 2022).

CHALLENGES TO STUDYING POPULIST BULLSHIT IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Researchers following up on these and other conceptual interlinkages between populism, bullshit and international politics are likely to encounter three problems. For one, they may find it difficult to find and/or access high-quality and empirical material across different cases. The current lack of a corpus of international political bullshit (populist or not) likely relates to, one, a tendency in existing scholarship on bullshit to focus on individual, often ideal-typical examples. This may stem from this scholarship's roots in philosophy. These examples, where they focus on political bullshit, are in turn usually drawn from the domestic arena. This is likely to do with ease of access, for example, to what is being said between world leaders at high-level meetings or summits. Perhaps therefore, there is a notable lack of focus so far on bullshit in international politics. This may change as the more particular forms and strategies of international political

communication of (populist) world leaders prone to bullshitting come into scholarly focus.

Relatedly, even the examples we do have of bullshit that touches on foreign policy and/or international politics, such as the one offered at the start of this chapter, often stem from a very limited set of speakers and contexts. In particular, Donald Trump and Boris Johnson's respective possible deception, lying, and bullshit have probably attracted the most scholarly attention. While it is likely that the English language plays a role here in terms of accessibility, it may also be because these populists produce particular kinds of bullshit. For example, one might hypothesize that both Trump and Johnson, because of the type of public persona they cultivate, produce more bald-faced than pseudo-profound or evasive bullshit. This in turn would make it more easily detectable. Four, lack of good corpus data likely also relates to definitional and conceptual issues around deception, lying and bullshit, which makes it difficult to pinpoint in particular cases. Here, scholars of populist communication in IR may turn to contemporary scholarship in philosophy and linguistics to clarify and operationalize terms and concepts, but also help drive an ongoing debate themselves—for example by leveraging cross-national experimental surveys on populist bullshit in international politics.

This already hints at wider methodological limitations of bullshit research. Beyond the different possible types of bullshit, it can be difficult to conceptually and empirically distinguish between bullshit as a deceptive form of political communication and, for example, lying or alternatively non-deceptive, truthful error. The linkage to speaker motivation (i.e. true intention) makes it difficult to prove, in any one case, whether the speaker did not actually care to contribute to genuine inquiry. It is impossible to know what motivated any one particular person, unless they share it truthfully. In the above example, Trump admitted to (even boasted about) bullshitting Trudeau in a later rally—but this type of 'transparency' about past intent is unusual. More often than not, the evidence for bullshit is circumstantial, for example, that speakers could and should have known better, yet still opted to deceive for electoral advantage (Hopkin & Rosamond, 2018; Meibauer, 2020).

This makes bullshit difficult to operationalize for empirical research—how do we know that what we hear or read is bullshit, as opposed to other types of vague, deceptive, or mistaken political communication? Specifically, can we know about the speaker's lack of interest in genuine inquiry? Note that the challenge around speaker intent is less problematic for

burgeoning bullshit receptivity scholarship, which tends to be interested in audience reactions to researcher-made vignettes. However, bullshit receptivity scholarship also struggles with clear-cut operationalization—in particular, conceptualizing which types of speech actually count as bullshit is a necessary precursor to vignette design for experimental surveys or similar. Finally, as scholars who study populists tend to be critical of them, investigating the linkage between bullshit and populist communication in international politics may require careful reflection of researcher positionality. Indeed, ‘calling out bullshit’, both colloquially as well as in research and perhaps especially so in international contexts, is morally charged. Researchers need to delineate concepts and terms carefully precisely because, aside from an analytical category, bullshit is also usually understood as a derogatory term. We should not fall prey to a possible desire to find bullshit where we most suspect it—used by people we do not like, and in international contexts that are often characterized by ambiguity, secrecy and frequent miscommunication.

CONCLUSION

Complementing and combining previous literature, I highlighted connection points between populism, bullshit, and international politics. Populists are likely to bullshit for four interlinking purposes: (1) to signal partisan transgression, (2) to produce their own authenticity, (3) to entertain, (4) to imply and suggest rather than explicitly say. These connections play out in the international sphere to affect both foreign policy as well as the conduct and outcomes of international politics. How populists conduct themselves at home may influence foreign policy when they hold executive office, but also if they have an influential, agenda-setting oppositional role. Populist bullshit abroad may result in a loss of reliability and trust with partners, and invite adversaries to exploit perceived ambiguity and uncertainty. The populist’s penchant for deceptive communication may affect international practices and outcomes, both via institutional and interpersonal routes. This concerns, for example, the conduct of diplomacy, the outcome of negotiations, or the international politics of trade and migration. I mapped out how this new field could be studied, and which challenges scholars of international populist bullshit may face. Following Frankfurt (2005), the good news (from the vantage point of the researcher) is that bullshit is everywhere. It is on us to investigate it where we find it—ideally not producing more of it while doing so.

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Populism Beyond Borders: Modi's Discursive Strategy with the Indian Diaspora in the United States of America

Chetan Rana

INTRODUCTION

Narendra Modi is not just the Prime Minister of India but also one of the most well-recognised faces of right-wing populists in power. Unlike many other ethno-populists, not only has Modi been able to come to power in India (in 2014) but has also been able to retain the position in 2019, winning by a greater majority. Globally, he is the face of the nation. One of the most recognisable features of his foreign policy toolkit has been the direct interaction and greater engagement with the Indian diaspora. Before him, addresses to the diaspora were generally limited to small meetings or dinners. By contrast, Modi has been speaking at the scale of public rallies abroad. He regularly recognises the achievements of the diaspora:

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Connecting our two nations is also a unique and dynamic bridge of three million Indian Americans. Today, they are among your best CEOs; academics; astronauts; scientists; economists; doctors; even spelling bee champions. They are your strength. They are also the pride of India. They symbolize the best of both our societies. (Modi, 2016)

In Modi's rhetoric on the global stage, where the whole world is one large family (*Vasudev Kutumbakam*), he has called the diaspora the 'representatives of India's great traditions' and first ambassadors. A large section of the Indian diaspora in the United States of America (US) has financially and organisationally supported the BJP and associated organisations' activities in India and the US (Naik & Trivedi, 2021; The Economic Times, 2022). This chapter seeks to explore the populist rhetoric beyond domestic boundaries and show how Modi's populist discursive strategy expands the construct of 'the people' to include the diaspora.

Populism remains a contested concept. Scholars have debated whether it is an ideology (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), discourse (Aslanidis, 2016), or a political strategy (Weyland, 2001). This chapter, drawing together different approaches, adopts Mudde's minimal definition of populism as a discourse/ideology centring on a binary between the pure people and the other (elites and outsiders). Therein, populism is anti-plural and anti-elite in its discourse. Right-wing populism creates binaries along the lines of ethnicity, religion, language etc. The people are represented as natives who have been alienated by the elites in favour of the others like migrants and minorities (Brubaker, 2017). The focus of this volume is on populist communication; therefore, the focus of this chapter too shall be to unpack the populist discursive strategy used by Modi in his engagement with Indian Americans.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section provides a background on populism in India and the features of populism under Modi. The second section brings out the growth trajectory of the Indian diaspora, especially in the US. The third section focuses on the reasons for diaspora engagement and the attitude of the diaspora towards the Modi government. The fourth section dives into the two main public addresses between 2014 and 2021 of Modi and analyses them for populist characteristics. The final and fifth section concludes the findings of the chapter.

MODI AND POPULISM IN INDIA

Populism in India is not a recent phenomenon. India emerged after a bloody partition in 1947 suffering from hunger, absolute poverty, low levels of literacy, and widespread communal tensions. The Indian Freedom Struggle led by Gandhi and Indian National Congress can be characterised as a form of populist mobilisation (Subramaniam, 2007). After independence, the constitution gave all adults above the age of 21 years the right to vote and the elections at state and national levels brought several of these issues into electoral discourse. The issues of basic amenities and identity have dominated Indian elections ever since with varying degrees. Populism, at the national level, re-emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s under Indira Gandhi. Gandhi's campaign was strongly focussed on the poor, and she gave the famous slogan '*Garibi Hatao, Desh Bachao*' (eliminate poverty, save the country). Congress and Gandhi loyalists like D.K. Barooah also gave another slogan that gathered drift during this phase, 'India is Indira, Indira is India'.

This style influenced several regional leaders and parties that emerged in the 1980s (Subramaniam, 2007). However, populist politics at a scale not seen since Indira Gandhi returned to India in 2014. The Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power with an overwhelming majority. It was the first time since 1984 that a party had secured a majority to form a government without a coalition. Significant credit for the victory was attributed to the 'Modi wave' (Chhibber & Verma, 2014).¹ According to Jaffrelot and Tillin (2017), populism under Narendra Modi has been only the latest among many in India. It differs from earlier populist waves as it attempts to define the Hindus as 'the people'. Earlier waves of populism, under Indira Gandhi and Charan Singh, focused on defining the poor and agrarian class as the people (Jaffrelot & Tillin, 2017; Plagemann & Destradi, 2018). The BJP government in India since 2014 under the Prime Ministership of Narendra Modi has been defined as right-wing populist or ethno-populist (Kenny, 2017; Wojcowski, 2019). The ethno-populist discourse based on Hindu Nationalist formulation paints Muslims as outsiders and disloyal (Varshney, 2021). This argument is sustained on creating the *pitribhumi* (fatherland) and *punyabhumi* (sacred land) distinction for Muslims in India, one of the

¹The phrase 'Modi wave' has been popularised by the members of the media to attribute BJP's election victories to the popular support enjoyed by Narendra Modi.

main ideas in Savarkar's 'Essentials of Hindutva'. This also allows the populist discourse to blame 'the elite', primarily the Congress Party, for defying 'the people' and appeasing the others. The anti-elite narrative is further strengthened by celebrating the virtuous masses and the identification of the populists with them. Modi is championed for his humble beginnings in contrast with the dynastic privileges of the Congress Party leadership, Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi (Varshney, 2021). Repeatedly, Modi and the BJP have manufactured an anti-elite discourse by distinguishing between 'Harvard' and 'hard work', demonising 'Lutyens Delhi', and delegitimising the term 'intellectuals' in the public sphere. Modi's populist discourse not only builds on traditional Hindutva and anti-elitist ideas but has also 'usurped the subaltern narrative of the left' (Ranjan, 2018). The narrative often focuses on the humble beginnings of the Prime Minister and how he has lived through poverty, hence helping the poor is his primary objective. This is accompanied by a host of welfarist policies (many repackaged from the UPA era) and their direct association with the PM or his face as a marketing strategy.

Plagemann and Destradi (2018, 2020) and Kenny (2017) have investigated the transformation, from the lens of populism, of Indian foreign policy under PM Modi. Plagemann and Destradi argue that even though populism may not immediately alter the substance of foreign policy, it certainly changes the style. Often it is the thick ideology that accompanies populism that will impact bilateral relations. Yet they identify the creation of transnational people as one of the features of a populist Indian foreign policy:

Modi, as well as former Foreign Secretary Jaishankar, habitually referred to Hinduism's—and Indians'—presence across the entire Indo-Pacific region....the diaspora has been framed by Modi's government as an "ambassador" of India....A transnational understanding of the "people" therefore seems to be a substantial element of innovation in Modi's that directly relates to his populism. (Plagemann & Destradi, 2018, pp. 12–13)

The discursive strategy employed with the diaspora expands the definition of 'the people' beyond national boundaries. One of the main participants of such an expansion has been the Indian diaspora in the US (2018). They also contextualise the historical inclination of the Hindu Nationalist organisations from the 1980s to reach out to the diaspora. However, these efforts and levels of engagement have reached a new high under Prime Minister Modi's government.

THE INDIAN DIASPORA IN THE US

Indians abroad are composed of two groups: Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). People from the Indian subcontinent have travelled to various parts of the world since ancient times as traders and merchants. However, emigration in significant volumes began during the nineteenth century under colonial rule. The emigration during the colonial period was largely to plantation colonies as indentured labour. Apart from indentured labour, the British moved Indians abroad for the laying of railways and administrative assistance (Rana, 2009). These people eventually settled in these new lands, while a few groups over time migrated to other countries becoming 'twice migrants' (Gowricharn, 2020). These PIOs form roughly half of the current Indian diaspora across the globe (Rana, 2009). However, the feature of post-independence emigration is the voluntary movement of skilled and semi-skilled workers to Europe, North America, and the Gulf.

Post-independence emigration is often categorised into two waves. The movement of labour migrants to the Gulf and a few other countries after the oil boom constitutes the first wave (Rana, 2009). The other wave refers to the movement of skilled labour to Europe and North America. Today, India is the biggest source of international migrants with 17.5 million (UN Migration 2020) and the US is the second-largest host for Indian migrants. These Indian migrants along with the PIOs, about 4.2 million according to American Community Survey (ACS), form the second-largest migrant group in the US (Badrinathan et al., 2021).

The expansion of the Indian diaspora in the US is a late twentieth-century phenomenon. However, the earliest migration from the Indian subcontinent to the US occurred in the late 1890s when peasants from Punjab travelled to work in lumber mills and agricultural fields. These migrants were referred to as 'Hindoos' irrespective of their religious affiliations as long as they were from the subcontinent. South Asian migrants faced racism at social and institutional levels (Lee, 2015). The Asiatic Exclusion League (AEL) rallied authorities to suspend the immigration of 'Hindoos' and even framed Indian nationalism as a threat to the national security of the US. The Immigration Act of 1917, the US Supreme Court ruling in the *Bhagat Singh Thind* case (1923), and the actions of the US Immigration Commission ruled South Asians ineligible for naturalised citizenship (Lee, 2015). Against these trends in the 1930s, India Welfare League and India League for America raised the demand for citizenship

and support for the anti-colonial struggle from the US government (Lal, 2007).

The US government was more accepting of these demands in the late 1930s and 1940s as they wanted to ensure India's support in World War II. In 1946, the US Congress approved the naturalisation of Indians and eased further immigration. However, it was only after the signing of the 1965 Immigration Act that the Indian American community could expand. Between 1980 and 2013, the migrant population from India doubled every decade (Lee, 2015). Migration post the 1965 Immigration Act can be divided into three phases (Chakravorty et al., 2017). The first wave of migrants was highly educated—primarily doctors, engineers, and scientists. The second wave from the 1980s consisted of the families and relatives of the immigrants which had moved to the US in the first wave. The third wave was primarily made up of computer and IT skilled migrants beginning in the mid-1990s. Today, according to the Indian American Attitudes Survey (2020), 77% of Indian Americans hold US citizenship. This includes PIOs born in the US and naturalised citizens. US Census data reveals that Indian Americans' standard of living is about double the median American household. They also have better educational qualifications than median Americans. While Indian Americans have been influential in business spheres, their political influence has also increased. The most symbolic example of it is the election of Kamala Harris as the Vice-President of the United States. Indian Americans today hold more elected offices than ever before (Iqbal, 2020). They also own one-third of Silicon Valley start-ups.

The primary reason for the prosperity of the Indian diaspora in the US lies in the 'triple selection' (Chakravorty et al., 2017). A potential immigrant to the US must have great educational qualifications and there is little scope for illegal migration into the US from India. Therefore, most of the immigrants come from well-off backgrounds that can support such education and cover their travel and documentation to the US. Thirdly, the focus of Indian higher education has been on engineering and medicine. The graduates in India were able to make most of the rising demand for these services in the US, which further rose with the boom of the IT industry. The Indian diaspora due to its economic and political capital has been influential in shaping Indo-US relations. The India Caucus has played an instrumental role in reshaping bilateral relations since the turn of the century. The caucus aided by groups like US-India Political Action Committee (USINPAC) lobbied for India after the 1998 Nuclear tests

and paved the route from sanctions to the landmark 123 agreement. They have also ensured that the Kashmir issue is framed as a bilateral matter between India and Pakistan. Furthermore, the lobby was influential in stifling US's assistance to Pakistan due to its role in the terror nexus in South Asia (Jaffrelot, 2009).

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

The engagement (structured or unstructured) of migrant-sending states and their actors with their diasporic communities is referred to as the diaspora strategy (Cohen, 2017). Over the last few decades, several works have come out to explain the motivations of sending states to engage with their diaspora. There are two prominent lines of argument that seek to explain the engagement with diaspora: the utilitarian approach and the ontological approach. The utilitarian explanation treats diaspora as a resource for the sending state. One of the most prominent examples of a utility motivated diaspora strategy is remittance capturing (Cohen, 2017). However, today it goes beyond just remittance capturing. It also involves mobilising the diaspora for investments, trade deals, and political lobbying. Such a diaspora strategy caters specifically to financially and politically influential members of the diaspora (Cohen, 2009). A utilitarian diaspora strategy will seek to cultivate and integrate the diasporic community with the institutions of the sending state (Gamlén, 2008). Another explanation of the utilitarian diaspora strategy is the extension of the Foucauldian notion of governmentality (Larner, 2007). The sending states, in the times of neoliberal globalisation, through diaspora strategy are moving beyond a territory-based concept of sovereignty to govern beyond borders.

The ontological approach challenges this utilitarian logic. Feminist ethics of care has primarily shaped this ontological approach (Ho et al., 2015). Diaspora strategy based on the ontological approach emphasises care and trust. The sending states have an imperative to look after their diaspora and ensure their public good, beyond just securing partisan motives. Therefore, unlike a utilitarian diaspora strategy, such a strategy focuses more on the vulnerable and lesser privileged sections of the diaspora.

Another important insight that emerges from diaspora studies is that diaspora is not a static category that emerges naturally and is used as-is by the sending state. Diaspora is a socially and politically constructed category. The state tailors its diaspora strategy to focus on particular sections of its diaspora. Certain people are included while other sections may be

excluded. A discursive strategy is crucial in demarcating the boundaries of diaspora and diaspora strategy (Ho et al., 2015; Lerner, 2007).

Today Modi's outreach to the diaspora has become a characteristic feature of his diplomacy. However, the diaspora, like any group, is not homogenous. The diasporic community, like Indian citizens, find themselves deeply divided over the Prime Minister. The Indian broadcast media often focuses on the huge numbers that turn up at Modi's addresses but conveniently omits the large protests that follow the Prime Minister. These protests are also led by the diaspora. Importantly, in 2005, it was the Indian diaspora that led the effort to ban Modi using the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act from travelling to the US because of his alleged role in the Gujarat pogrom. The ban was lifted only after Modi became the Prime Minister. Religion continues to be an important part of the Indian diaspora's identity in the US (Badrinathan et al., 2021, pp. 16–17). The Indian diaspora puts great emphasis on their 'Indian-ness' and shows a great degree of endogamy and social networks dominated by fellow Indian Americans. The political polarisation along party-lines in India is also visible in the US. The polarisation witnessed along the lines of Indian parties is greater than witnessed over the Democrat-Republican divide (Badrinathan et al., 2021, pp. 38–39). While new Hindu-right organisations have propped up of late, several have been active for decades, for example, Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA), Hindu American Foundation (HAF), Sewa International etc. Many of these are associated with or inspired by the RSS. Awareness against 'Hinduphobia' has been one of their longest running agendas (Hindu American Foundation, n.d.). Today, 'Hinduphobia' also includes any and all criticisms of Modi, the BJP government, and the RSS in India as testified by the responses of these organisations to events like 'Dismantling Global Hindutva Conference' (The Indian Express, 2021). The organisers and speakers were pressured and threatened by both Indian and US-based Hindu groups like *Hindu Janagruti Samiti* and *Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America* (VHPA).

ANALYSIS OF MODI'S INTERACTION WITH INDIAN AMERICANS

Between 2014 and 2021, during his seven visits (Table 13.1), PM Modi has delivered several statements as parts of summits, press conferences, diaspora events, and to the US Congress. The focus of this study is on his discursive strategy with the diaspora. In this regard, there are two important speeches—Madison Square Garden in New York (2014) and 'Howdy Modi!' at NRG Stadium in Houston (2019)—which have been analysed.

From a distance, there is a stark difference in the content of Modi's discursive style on the international stage vis-à-vis the domestic sphere. The elements of Hindutva ideology are limited. The populist style, while comparatively toned down, is not entirely absent. As has been a pattern across Modi's addresses internationally, a lot of emphasis is put on India's status as the world's largest democracy, especially given its diversity. He quotes 'unity in diversity' as the basis of 'vibrant democracy' in India. He began his 'Howdy Modi!' address by speaking 'everything is fine' in multiple languages of India. However, the sanitisation of content on an international stage does not entirely eliminate the Hindutva ideology. Even in limited measure, few identifiable long-standing Hindutva ideas appear in his speeches. In 2014, while talking about the colonial period in India, he refers to how India was colonised for 1000 years even before the British. This is an important element of Hindutva revisionist history which seeks to paint the Delhi sultans and the Mughal emperors as foreign invaders

Table 13.1 PM Modi's visits to the US

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Purpose of visit</i>
26–30 September 2014	UN General Assembly and state visit to the US
24–30 September 2015	UN General Assembly, visit to the Silicon Valley
31 March–1 April 2016	Nuclear Security Summit
6–8 June 2016	State visit to the US
25–26 June 2017	State visit to the US
20–27 September 2019	UN General Assembly and Howdy Modi
22–26 September 2021	UN General Assembly, Quad Leaders' Summit, and state visit to the US

and colonisers. In 2019, he emphasised his government's 'achievement' in abrogating article 370 which provided the state of Jammu and Kashmir a 'special status'. He termed the article as a '70 years old challenge' which had only served the interests of terrorists and separatists. Over the decades, revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir has been one of the three most important political goals of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar (Jaffrelot, 2021). He even asked the audience to give a standing ovation to the Indian parliamentarians who had passed the legislation.

A feature of populism under the BJP has been the blurring of lines between Hindutva and nationalism. The nationalist/anti-Nationalist discourse has become a widely used tool to target critics of the government. Nationalism, in the current ethno-populist discourse, has been an important characteristic of the description of the people. Modi, in his addresses, made continuous references to nationalism and national interests. While discussing his idea of public participation in 2014, he suggests that everyone—whether a cleaner cleaning with the purpose of '*desh seva*' (nation's service) or a doctor treating the poor as '*rasthrabhakti*' (patriotism)—must act to serve the national interest. He also says that the Indian Americans must work to repay '*matribhumi ka karz*' (debt of motherland). He even began and ended his address by leading the chants of '*Bharat Mata ki jai*' (long live Mother India). One of the most populist stylistic features of his engagement has been his focus to paint himself as an 'ordinary' person while also at several instances where he hints at his exceptionalism. In Houston, Modi says that he is a '*sadharan vyakti*' (ordinary person) working at the instruction of 1.3 billion Indians. In 2014, he referred to himself as '*chhota aur samanya insaan*' (a small regular person) who has reached his current position by selling teas at a point. The reality of Modi at his father's tea stall is contested, however, that has not stopped the PM from using it as a tool, domestically and internationally, not only to highlight his humble beginning but also to distinguish him from the elite. Domestically, this has been a fundamental element of BJP and Modi's discourse. Several opposition leaders, especially the Gandhis, have been declared elite and aloof about the life of common people in India.

A prominent feature of populist leaders is their tendency to highlight their exceptionalism. They try to project their commitment to achieving the goals for 'the people' and project their unique capacity to meet them. Modi in 2014 claimed that since assuming the position of Prime Minister, he has not taken a vacation for even 15 minutes. In the same speech, while

discussing the issue of cleaning the Ganga River, he mentioned that people had suggested that he must not take up such a risky assignment. However, if only doing easy tasks was the job, he would not have been chosen as the Prime Minister. He continues to emphasise his ability to work hard and aim for tougher tasks in his 2019 address through a self-written couplet. Modi also strategically pauses in his speeches. In 2014, he claimed that the twenty-first century may well be India's century and not just Asia's century because of three factors. Similarly, in 2019, he rhetorically asks the reason for his party's return to power with an even greater majority. In both instances, he pauses, and the crowd begins to chant his name. Even though he himself doesn't credit himself as he continues with his speech, a seasoned orator such as himself knows the utility of timely pauses. Modi, like other populists, has often claimed to have a direct connection with the people. In his addresses to the American Indians, he emphasised that the distance between them and him is not a factor. He claims that irrespective of the distance, he is well aware of their pains. The diaspora is too connected with him as they 'were celebrating the election results'. Modi also claimed that the nature of embassies and consulates has changed under his government—not just government offices but the diaspora's 'first friend'. In 2014, he asked the diaspora to use mygov.in to connect with him. The change in tone to make communication personal and direct is a recognised feature of populist discourse.

A feature of his speeches is to mark not just an improvement but a clear cleavage in the functioning of his government vis-à-vis the preceding governments. In New York, he highlighted how the preceding governments enjoyed and just focused on making laws, whereas he is focusing on removing them. In a similar vein, in Houston, a major section of his address focused on the achievements his government had made in just 5 years compared to roughly 60 years of records before that. It also must be noted that while great advances have been made, his claims on rural sanitation, gas connections, banking coverage etc. achieving 95+% results are still contested and not absolute facts.² Even though Indian Americans happen to be one of the most prosperous communities in the US and the world, Modi throughout his speech projected a pro-poor image. He highlighted that many of his schemes are centred on the welfare of the poor:

²For example, Modi claimed that the rural sanitation rate under his government has risen from 38% to 99%. Such a claim is based on NITI Aayog's report on India's status as an open-defecation free state. However, these reports have been challenged (Agarwal, 2021).

‘...chhote chhote logo ke liye bade kaam karne ka irada rakhta hun’ (Modi, 2014) (I intend to do big things for small/regular people).³

While talking about the elections in India, he stated how the poor had participated despite the heat and had surprised the ‘opinion-makers’. This weaves from the domestic discourse which has alienated the intelligentsia and public intellectuals in the country. The people know better and can prove the intellectuals wrong. During his interactions with the diaspora, Modi repeatedly mentioned how India is undergoing great changes and moving towards a ‘New India’. As mentioned earlier, he asked them to contribute to the nation’s progress. He regularly mentioned the changing laws which are creating a conducive business environment and the scope for the diaspora to participate in his flagship scheme ‘Make in India’. During his visits, he met with the representatives of the business community and made a trip to Silicon Valley. Further, with the growing influence of the India Caucus and organisations that lobby for India’s interests, it is clear that a focused strategy aimed at the Indian diaspora in the US is for utilitarian purposes. However, the content of Modi’s speeches also displays an expansion of ‘the people’ to subsume the hardworking and flourishing diaspora. While the focus on the American diaspora vis-à-vis any diaspora in any other state is based on utilitarian ends, the discursive strategy is rooted in espousing nativism. Therefore, utility becomes synonymous with duty. While phrases like ‘matribhumi’, ‘Bharatmata’, ‘rashtrabhakti’ etc. are symbols of BJP’s prominent Nationalist discourse domestically, with respect to the diaspora it seeks to strengthen their transnational identity.

CONCLUSION

As the research on populist communication grows, it is bound to go beyond the domestic sphere and unpack its influence on the public diplomacy styles of populist parties and leaders. This chapter focused on a particular case of Modi’s engagement with the Indian Americans. First, the analysis of his public addresses indicates a tuning down of Hindutva ideological components on the international stage. However, they are not absent. He projects securing long-standing Hindutva political goals as achievements of his government, just covered in the narrative of development and governance. Second, there is a continuity of anti-elitist and

³Translated by the author.

pro-poor narrative in his content. The targets of his anti-elitist discourse are not spelled out in his speeches in the US like they are in India, however, similar tones are present. Third, he, directly and indirectly, keeps referring to his exceptional ability to take up huge tasks, work for the poor, and make a new India. For this, he also strategically uses pauses in his speech for the crowd to chant his name and affirm the notion. Fourth, the nationalism discourse, which has been a prominent feature of Modi's populist discourse domestically, is widely seen in his speeches. The diaspora is framed as the 'representatives of Indian traditions' who should contribute to the progress of the motherland. Fifth, irrespective of the prosperous nature of the Indian American community and their small role in domestic politics, the pro-poor discourse and welfarism form major parts of Modi's speeches. Sixth, a common feature of the populist style—the idea of direct communication—is also present. An attempt is made to show how the diaspora too was rooting for Modi's electoral success in India. The chapter thus shows how the populist repertoire goes beyond borders and influences engagement with the diaspora and public diplomacy at large.

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International Constellations of the Populist Radical-Right: An Analysis of Jair Bolsonaro's International Speeches (2019–2020)

Eduardo Ryo Tamaki and Gustavo Venturelli

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, Brazil saw the rise of a far-right politician. Jair Bolsonaro was a former army captain who portrayed himself as a maverick and a dissonant figure who often flaunted his connection with the “common man” while sustaining carnivalesque mockery and promising to rid the establishment of the “old, crooked politics.” With a moderate populist, but clear-cut Nationalist and patriotic speech (Tamaki et al., 2021a), Jair Messias

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Bolsonaro broke Brazil's non-populism streak and got elected to the presidency in the fourth-largest democracy in the world. Riding this "new populist wave" (Foa & Mounk, 2019), already in his campaign, Bolsonaro presented a mild populism and "aggressive forms of nationalism and patriotism" (Tamaki et al., 2021a, p. 14). His populism was highly exclusionary, pitching "us" against alien minorities while aiming to reduce their participation and acceptance by delegitimizing and attacking their rights. Following a staunch defense of illiberalism, Bolsonaro went further, attacking the opposition's rights and democratic institutions—such as the electoral system and the Supreme Federal Court. Once Bolsonaro assumed office, his populist rhetoric was expected to adapt to his new role as part of the political establishment. In theory, once president, the anti-political-elite discourse he presented during his campaign would be much more challenging to sustain. In practice, his supporters continued to view him as an outsider, even though he held the highest political office in Brazil. This perception allowed Bolsonaro to maintain his anti-political rhetoric, which primarily targeted his political and ideological opponents and other democratic institutions. Despite the challenges of governing as a populist leader—whose discourse was mainly against the political elite—Bolsonaro was able to adapt his rhetoric to maintain an anti-establishment stance that resonated with his supporters.

Internationally, President Bolsonaro's attempt to forge a new national identity was at the root of major shifts in Brazil's foreign policy. His efforts revolved around the concept of a Nationalist country built on conservative and religious values and anti-globalization ideas (Casarões & Farias, 2021). This allowed Bolsonaro to engage and manage his populism through discursive elements that extended beyond regional specificities, uniting himself with a populist radical-right wave (Mudde, 2007) based primarily on anti-globalization and ultraconservative discourses in response to a perceived "culture war."

Bolsonaro's international discourses were noted to be frequently more populist than his domestic speeches (Tamaki, 2021; Ricci & Venturelli, 2023). These findings, however, have not been explored in depth. So how does Jair Bolsonaro's populism behave internationally? And how has this influenced his overall populist rhetoric? This chapter seeks to build upon initial observations by Tamaki (2021) and Ricci and Venturelli (2023), and analyze the nuances of Bolsonaro's populism abroad. It tries to understand the hallmarks of Bolsonaro's international populism, and by doing so, offer a deeper understanding of how Bolsonaro's populist rhetoric

traveled from different contexts and how it has influenced his overall populism.

To answer our research question, we examine Bolsonaro's international speeches. We hypothesize that his international populism spawns from domestic themes, but gives them an international and, sporadically, transnational dimension—that facilitates its use internationally. National elements, such as values and identities, are used as identity markers not limited to Brazil but, given the current far-right populist wave, connect to global themes and issues. Similarly, “others” (or the “enemies”) are often threats that have primary importance within a domestic context but can also be exaggerated to fit into broader narratives.

We focus on the first two years of Bolsonaro's administration, 2019 and 2020, reviewing discourses from his official government speeches and analyzing them through a mixed man-machine approach (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016). We apply a combination of computerized content analysis based on a dictionary approach followed by a hand-check in positive cases (classic content analysis). Our results reinforce that Bolsonaro is slightly more populist in international discourses, although the difference is not statistically significant. While he presents 25% of domestic speeches classified as populist, when it comes to international discourses (that means discourses given in an international context or to international audiences), Bolsonaro is populist at 35%. All in all, even though a considerable part of Bolsonaro's international speeches is characterized as populist, their intensity is, on average, pretty low, justifying his classification as somewhat populist (even internationally).

Overall, his rhetoric revolves around two main issues or dimensions. First is the ideological struggle against the resurrected communist threat: a broader and generic “left,” referring to left-wing parties, politicians, partisans, supporters, and media outlets, mainly domestically but also internationally. They would soon become “them,” an evil “out-group” created vis-à-vis “us,” filled with a moral marker mainly defined by religious and conservative identity. Hence, the core of Brazilian society, the family, would be transformed into something sacred, which brings us to the second issue: the “traditional family.”

In what follows, the chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, we discuss the concept of populism, following the ideational approach (Hawkins et al., 2019; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), and present the Brazilian context that precedes the period of our investigation. The

second part presents our case study, drawing from the analysis of 334 official speeches given by Jair Bolsonaro from 2019 to 2021.

POPULISM AND BRAZIL: JAIR BOLSONARO

We conceptualize populism as a set of ideas often manifested through discursive elements. Also known as the ideational definition, it conveys populism as a Manichaeian discourse that revolves around two necessary and sufficient conditions: (i) people-centrism, or the belief in the existence of a morally and homogeneous good “people,” created in opposition to an (ii) equally inherently evil “elite,” perceived as selfish and self-serving—an anti-elitism or anti-establishment. Ultimately, the classification of “populist” must adhere to both of these dimensions. If thought about as a discourse (Hawkins, 2009), populism would relate to a “descriptor,” or a moral discourse potentially used by any politician (and even the media or citizens), which explains why actors become more or less populist over time (Van Kessel, 2014; March, 2019), and also elucidates why we often study populist ideas in the rhetoric of political leaders, parties, and movements.

Drawing upon the ideational approach, we turn our attention to Brazil. Our aim in this chapter is to examine Bolsonaro’s rhetoric, focusing on his international speeches. In 2018, amid a multidimensional crisis, Brazil’s “perfect storm” (Hunter & Power, 2019) paved the way for Jair Bolsonaro to become the 38th president of Brazil. In analyzing his presidential campaign, Tamaki and Fuks (2020), and Tamaki et al. (2021a) coded and analyzed Jair Bolsonaro’s campaign speeches, measuring his degree of populism through a holistic method of textual analysis. Their findings indicate that Bolsonaro’s campaign can only be considered “*somewhat populist*,” scoring just enough to put him on the lower end of what is classified as “populist” (Hawkins et al., 2019).

Be it as it may, Bolsonaro is clearly the most populist president Brazil has seen ever since Fernando Collor de Mello in 1990 (Ricci et al., 2021; Tamaki, 2021). Tamaki (2021), when analyzing his first two years in power, classified Bolsonaro, through the use of holistic grading, as a “somewhat populist.” Although not close enough to the likes of Evo Morales and Hugo Chávez, Bolsonaro’s populism was similar to what could be seen in Donald Trump and Viktor Orban. Likewise, Ricci et al. (2021) applied content analysis to Bolsonaro’s 2019 official speeches and found that 12% of his speeches were populist. Finally, on a similar path,

Ricci and Venturelli (2023) further used classic content analysis and classified 37%¹ of Bolsonaro's 2019 and 2020 official speeches as populist, although populism is present in low intensity on average.²

Domestically, Bolsonaro's populism is characterized by a divisive discourse that pits "us" against "them." He frequently identifies certain groups, such as leftists, minorities, and the media, as enemies of the Brazilian people. This tactic has been used by other far-right politicians, such as Donald Trump in the United States and Matteo Salvini in Italy, to mobilize their base and galvanize support among disaffected voters.

Internationally, Bolsonaro is part of the larger far-right wave that has been sweeping across various countries and regions in recent years. As Thiers and Wehner (in this volume) point out, an anti-globalist dimension and nationalistic frames would bring together Bolsonaro and other anti-pluralist leaders. As a clear playbook example of the far-right, Jair Bolsonaro's narrative exposes elements of a "culture war," often created around an ideological-moral struggle between the traditional, religious "Christian family" and the "progressive left-wing." Ideologically, his views are based on the idea of "*familialism*," which prioritizes the traditional family as the foundation of the nation (Kemper, 2016, cited in Mudde, 2019). Ultimately, for Bolsonaro (and his rationale), this means that the notions of "femininity" and "masculinity"—and consequently the idea of "family," are very traditional, heterosexual, and male-dominated. In practice, when it comes to gender-related issues, this leads to certain hostility toward women and men who do not adhere to these sexist ideals.

Building on the previous discussion of Bolsonaro's populist rhetoric, this chapter aims to delve deeper into the ways in which his populism manifests itself beyond Brazil's borders. Our overall purpose is to provide a nuanced understanding of Bolsonaro's populism, both domestically and internationally, within the context of the global far-right. Through analyzing his international speeches, we will explore the markers of Bolsonaro's international populism and how they connect to his overall populist rhetoric. This includes examining how Bolsonaro, like other

¹ Ricci and Venturelli (2023) classified Bolsonaro's speeches into three categories: populism, nationalism, and national populism. Thirty-seven percent is the sum of populism and national populism. The latter category refers to speeches with populist plus nationalist paragraphs or discourses with populist nationalist paragraphs—when both are present in the same paragraph.

² Not to count other works such as Mendonça and Caetano (2021), which also classified Bolsonaro as populist but based on different approaches.

far-right politicians, appeals to separate national peoples confronting the same concerns and enemies (international populism) while also practicing the construction of a people that goes beyond national particularities (transnational populism) (de Cleen et al., 2020). By shedding light on these tactics, we can gain insights into how populist politicians mobilize support both at home and abroad.

METHODOLOGY

In total, we analyzed 334 speeches given over a 24-month period (between January 2019 and December 2020),³ representing roughly 4463 paragraphs. For the purpose of this chapter, we further divided them into “national” and “international” speeches. International speeches typically addressed audiences from other countries or were given within an international context (accepting few exceptions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when international travels were less common).

To analyze the material, we used a mixed man-machine approach (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Ricci et al., 2021), where we applied a combination of computerized and classical content analyses based on a dictionary. The first step was to create two dictionaries—one for terms related to “the people” and another for “the elite” (both within a Manichaeic frame). Here we followed the same logic, compiling dictionaries already given by the literature (Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Nishikawa, 2021) with terms found when reading a sample of our sources. We built these dictionaries following a previous version available by Ricci et al. (2021) and worked on them by ourselves.

The second step was to have a computer scan our sample for all the words belonging to both dictionaries. Here we looked for the concomitant appearance of “the people” and “the elite” in the same paragraph (our unit of measurement). Consequently, the computer highlighted the selected words and the paragraphs in which they appeared. Human coders interpreted the results in the third phase to avoid false positives. Following the criterion that both “the people” and “the elite” should be present in the same paragraph for us to consider it positive for populism, and considering that the existence of both does not imply an antagonistic moral

³ Available at <https://www.gov.br/planalto/pt-br/acompanhe-o-planalto/discursos>. Access: February 2021.

distinction (Manicheism), we manually validated positive cases and recoded false negatives.

We chose paragraphs as our unit of measurement by considering them an intermediate between sentences and whole texts since “they tend to be more productive” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 206). Those distinguishing between people and elites based on a moral dualism were classified as “populist”; in the lack of such antagonism, we classified them as “non-populist.” Finally, we computed the percentage of populist paragraphs in every speech. One populist paragraph is necessary and sufficient for us to consider the whole speech positive for populism.

Since our method partially relies on human coding, we calculate *Krippendorff’s alpha* to ensure consistency. *Krippendorff’s alpha* is a coefficient developed to measure intercoder reliability, or to put it differently, to measure the agreement achieved between observers. It is highly used in content analysis, and it helps to assess if the results were the product of chance or if they represent a more consistent assessment of the subject in question. According to Krippendorff (2011), an alpha of 1 indicates “perfect reliability,” while an alpha of zero would represent the absence of reliability. For the social sciences, we should only rely on conclusions drawn upon data that present reliability above an $\alpha = 0.8$. In our case, we achieved an acceptable score of $\alpha = 0.83$.

Results

Although Bolsonaro was elected in 2018 with mild populist rhetoric, it was unclear if his government would follow a similar path. Now that Bolsonaro had become part of the political establishment that he fought so hard to overthrow, it was still unclear whether he would be able to maintain anti-establishment rhetoric. Therefore, scholars have diligently analyzed and classified his discourse since his election, arriving at similar conclusions and classifying Bolsonaro as a populist through different methods, even if the degree of such classification varies. A brief analysis of Bolsonaro’s discourse on our part points in the same direction. Table 14.1 summarizes the results of 334 speeches he gave between 2019 and 2020. Considering that just one paragraph is necessary and sufficient to classify the entire speech as a populist, Bolsonaro addressed 89 (27%) populist speeches. While our study differs from Tamaki (2021) and Ricci et al. (2021), it is closer to Ricci and Venturelli (2023), who also used

Table 14.1 Results of
Bolsonaro’s speeches

<i>Category</i>	<i>All speeches</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Populism	89	27%
Non-populism	245	73%
Total	334	100%

Source: Made by the authors with data from planalto.gov.br

Table 14.2 Disaggregated results of Bolsonaro’s speeches: national vs. international

<i>Category</i>	<i>All speeches</i>		<i>National speeches</i>		<i>International speeches</i>	
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Perc.</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Perc.</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Perc.</i>
Populism	89	27%	74	25%	15	35%
Non-populism	245	73%	217	75%	28	65%
Total	334	100%	291	100%	43	100%

Source: Made by the authors with data from planalto.gov.br

paragraphs as the unit of measurement.⁴ Our results indicate that paragraphs work better for the analysis for two reasons: first, the bigger the unit, the harder it is to achieve agreement, and the more time-consuming the task is. Lastly, sentences tend to underestimate the level of populism once the opposition between “the people” and “the elite” could appear in the same paragraph but not in the same sentence.

Quantitative Analysis: National vs. International Speeches

An interesting question in the specialized literature is whether populist leaders tend to be more populist in their country or abroad, specifically when they speak to national or international audiences. Contrary to what is expected (e.g., Hawkins, 2009), Bolsonaro tends to make more populist appeals when he presents himself to international audiences. When we look at international speeches, 35% are populist, while populist speeches addressed to Brazilian audiences are 25%. Table 14.2 illustrates this by

⁴ Ricci and Venturelli (2023) only applied classic (hand coding) content analysis.

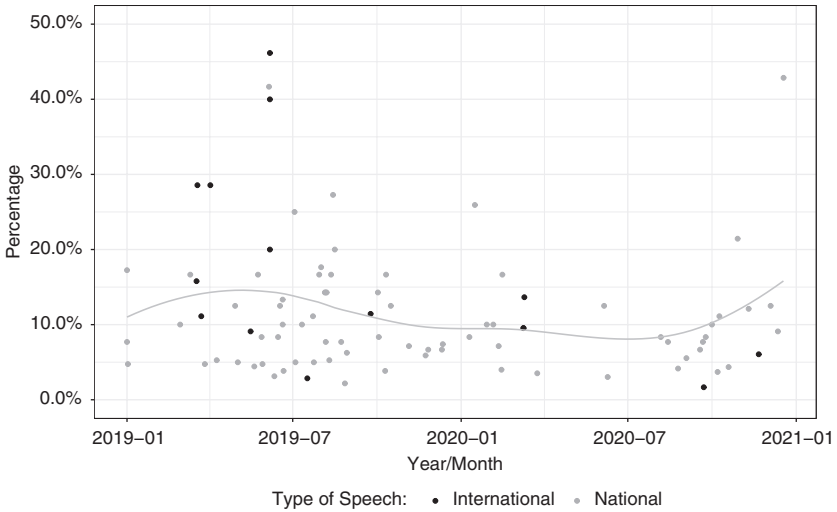


Fig. 14.1 Percentage of populism in Jair Bolsonaro’s speeches by type. Each point represents a speech. (Source: Made by the authors with data from planalto.gov.br)

showing the disaggregated results for Bolsonaro’s speeches according to the distinction between national and international discourses.

Figure 14.1 also shows the dispersion of the percentage of populist speeches around its moving average. Whereas the *x-axis* shows the chronology in terms of month/year, the *y-axis* presents the intensity of populism in each of these speeches (i.e., the percentage of populist paragraphs). From there, analyses are threefold. First, we can see that Bolsonaro was more populist in 2019 when 58 out of 204 speeches (28.4%) were classified as “populist,” in comparison to 31 out of 130 (23.8%) in 2020. However, we must also be cautious, as Bolsonaro spoke more in 2019. In 2020, primarily due to Covid-19 restrictions, the number of speeches, especially international ones, was significantly reduced.

Second, as anticipated, there is a clear difference between national and international speeches, as Tables 14.3 and 14.4 help further illustrate. Although not statistically significant,⁵ this difference has a practical implication. Considering the total number of speeches given in both contexts

⁵The result has no statistical significance at $p < 0.05$. Fisher exact test statistic = 0.199.

Table 14.3 Disaggregated results of Bolsonaro’s speeches: national vs. international (2019)

<i>Category</i>	<i>2019 National speeches</i>		<i>2019 International speeches</i>	
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Perc.</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Perc.</i>
Populism	48	27%	10	37%
Non-populism	129	73%	17	63%
Total	177	100%	27	100%

Source: Made by the authors with data from planalto.gov.br

Table 14.4 Disaggregated results of Bolsonaro’s speeches: national vs. international (2020)

<i>Category</i>	<i>2020 National speeches</i>		<i>2020 International speeches</i>	
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Perc.</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Perc.</i>
Populism	26	23%	5	31%
Non-populism	88	77%	11	69%
Total	114	100%	16	100%

Source: Made by the authors with data from planalto.gov.br

and in both years (Table 14.2), Bolsonaro’s international speeches exhibited a frequency of populist rhetoric almost 10% higher than his domestic speeches.

One possible explanation for the observed discrepancy is that Bolsonaro may have felt more comfortable exposing his populist views to audiences and governments ideologically aligned with him. For instance, some of the countries he visited were governed by far-right populist leaders who had expressed support for Bolsonaro’s government (Hawkins & Littvay, 2019; Filc & Pardo, 2021). However, our data do not provide sufficient evidence to support this hypothesis. Besides only visiting countries governed by center-right and right-wing parties⁶ (between 2019 and 2020), when

⁶Following scores from the *V-Party* (Lindberg et al. 2022) dataset, the most left-winger party governing a country visited by Bolsonaro is the Chinese Communist Party, with a score equal to 2.8, which, when rounded, means it is a center party. Putin, for instance, is independent, so if we attribute to him the score of the last party in which he was a member, he is a 3. The third and last case below 4 (center-right) would be Mauricio Macri, in Argentina, whose party scores 3.8.

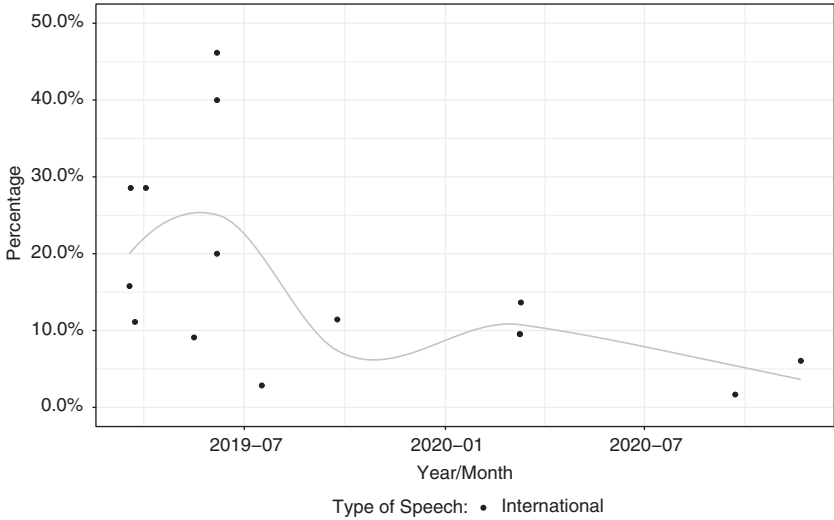


Fig. 14.2 Percentage of populism in Jair Bolsonaro’s international speeches. Each point represents a speech. (Source: Made by the authors with data from planalto.gov.br. The graph contains only 14 observations—instead of 15—because in March 2020, in Miami, both speeches given that day had the same percentage of populism)

visiting populist leaders such as Modi in India, Bolsonaro used no populist appeals, whereas, in the United States, he tended to be more populist, despite some of these meetings being multilateral and Trump’s presence not being a significant factor. Further research is needed to examine the relationship between Bolsonaro’s political alliances and his use of populist rhetoric in international contexts.

Finally, upon closer inspection, we observed a slight decrease in Bolsonaro’s international populism as time progressed. Graph 1 (Fig. 14.1) already anticipated this, but graph 2 (Fig. 14.2), which depicts only the international speeches, makes this pattern even more apparent. Besides the reason anticipated (how Covid-19 prevented many international speeches from taking place, and changed the format of others), the decrease of populism in Bolsonaro’s pronouncements throughout 2020 also goes side by side with domestic causes: his political agreements with center-wing parties. Despite being elected with anti-establishment rhetoric, which means avoiding coalition presidentialism in the Brazilian case, Bolsonaro’s

administration faced many defeats in the Brazilian Congress. The Chamber of Deputies (Brazilian Lower House) has too many parties, so the President's party cannot approve its agenda without building a coalition government. After so many losses, in 2020, Bolsonaro started to cede, negotiating with other parties and nominating a few center party members to Ministries—especially undersecretary positions—in exchange for support inside the Congress (Couto, 2021).

But, for a few reasons, one should be cautious about his (international) populism decreasing in 2020. It is worth noting that the overall level of populism was rising in the last three months of 2020 (Fig. 14.1).⁷ If, as previously said, the intensity of populism dropped while just looking at international speeches, we may conclude that the pattern of being more populist overseas was turning to what populists are expected to be—being more populist when addressing national audiences. With the information we have, however, we cannot answer why this is the case. Therefore, everything appears to be a blur in this situation.

First, one would expect less populism, especially in 2020 national speeches, once Bolsonaro conforms to the Brazilian coalition presidentialism since he has to negotiate with several parties, which would supposedly moderate him. For three-quarters of the year, this is true. However, it is exactly after almost a year of opening his administration's doors to other parties that domestic discourses begin to show higher levels of populism than foreign ones. An alternative hypothesis or second tentative answer is that the tendency inverts since he has traveled less because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas he made 11 trips in 2019, in 2020 these were replaced by nine virtual speeches to different countries. Since our data limitations do not allow us to raise and address causal questions, let us unpack how Bolsonaro's populism abroad is shaped.

Qualitative Analysis: International Speeches

Whereas populist leaders tend to be more populist in their own countries, where they address large audiences and often appeal to the nation as a whole (e.g., Hawkins, 2009), Bolsonaro has shown himself to be proportionately more populist in foreign countries. During his government, Bolsonaro limited his international travels to countries with a similar

⁷This also highlights the importance of scrutinizing Bolsonaro's government during the last two years.

right-wing conservative agenda. Places like the United States, Israel, and even Argentina (which at the time was facing a highly polarized presidential election) were common destinations and were often the topic of his discourses.

Internationally, ideology is central to Bolsonaro's populist appeals. It divides and morally qualifies the opposition between the people and the elite, shaping group identity according to ideological queues linked to "good morality" in opposition to the elite's corrupt nature. A construction that might happen "outside" of Brazil but pertains to an internal division. In shaping the idea of "us," progressive policies are necessarily tied to ideological enemies whose primary purpose would be to destroy what comprises the essence of national values: Christianity, conservatism, and heteronormativity. Consequently, "the people" is often construed internationally as those who mirror these same virtues and values, who identify with Bolsonaro's battle against the "left":

I end by saying that Brazil and the United States are also coming forth to the guarantee of freedoms in respect of the traditional family, in the fear of God, our creator; against gender ideology, political correctness and fake news. And inspiring me, inspired by Ronald Reagan, I want to take to Brazil his way of administering, summarized in the following sentence of his authorship: 'the people should say what the government can do and not the other way around.'⁸ (Washington, US, March 19, 2019)

The passages below illustrate how Bolsonaro varies between international and transnational populism:

*Trades will no longer be guided by ideological bias as they used to be. So, we are also committed to this goal for the good of **our peoples**.* (Washington, US, March 19, 2019)

*I firmly believe in the re-election of Donald Trump. **The people** who supported him in the past, just as was done with me in Brazil, will certainly repeat their vote.* (Washington, US, March 19, 2019)

⁸ Original passage in Portuguese: "Encerro dizendo, que o Brasil e os Estados Unidos também estão emanados na garantia das liberdades, no respeito à família tradicional, no temor a deus, nosso criador, contra ideologia de gênero, o politicamente correto e as "fake news". E, inspirando-me em ronald reagan, quero levar para o Brasil a sua forma de administrar, resumida na seguinte frase de sua autoria: 'o povo deve dizer o que o governo pode fazer e não o contrário.'"

*I have always criticized the ideological use of Mercosur in Brazil... There is a unique opportunity to... bring happiness to **our people**.* (Buenos Aires, Argentina. June 6, 2019)

The first paragraph constructs “peoples” in the plural, acknowledging their distinct nations (international populism). The final two demonstrate his transnational populism. Whereas in the United States, the use of singular people implies that those who support Trump and himself are the same, in Argentina, the people include not only Brazilians and Argentineans, but every citizen inside Mercosur who is ideologically aligned with him.

The implications of this vignette are three. First, following the populist playbook, Bolsonaro highlights the idea of “popular sovereignty” by saying that it is “the people who should dictate the path the government should follow, and not the other way around.” Second, at the same time he evokes the idea of “us,” he limits it to only those who identify and share the same values as him: Christianity (“God-fearing”), conservatism (“in respect of the traditional family”), heteronormativity (“against gender ideology”), and that oppose what the “left” represents (“gender ideology,”⁹ political correctness, and fake news)—bringing in an anti-elitism. Finally, the idea of a “traditional family” encompasses American and Brazilian families, oscillating between an international (when the particularities of each of “the peoples” are kept) and transnational (when Bolsonaro aims to create a unified “people” gathering Brazilians and Americans by a common cultural and religious ground) constructions of the people¹⁰ (de Cleen et al., 2020). Even though usually both “the people” and “the elite” are domestically constructed, they are part of a transnational idea of “us” and “them” that goes beyond the national territory (Moffitt, 2017; de Cleen et al., 2020), as we will show below. Although Bolsonaro’s (international) populism is somewhat directed to a national context, its implications can be felt internationally.

Now, I believe that the great transformation in Brazil comes from the hands of God, first, (...) and then the other miracle, the occasion of the elections (his

⁹“Gender Ideology” is a pejorative term coined by the Catholic Church to fight against gender issues and related subjects. Widely influential in Latin America, the term is often used by those who fear that discussing sexuality in school will induce homosexuality and erode the traditional family (Biroli, 2020).

¹⁰That is also the case when speaking in Argentina and Chile, where the presidents were facing elections challenged by a left-wing party and mass protests, respectively.

*electoral victory in 2018); that the Brazilian people – very similar to the American people: a conservative people, God-fearing, therefore, Christian, and who no longer accepted there (in both the United States and Brazil), (...) the growth of the left and the negative example of the Venezuela (...).*¹¹
(Washington, US. March 19, 2019)

To better understand this episode, we need to break it down into two separate parts. First, there is “people-centrism.” Bolsonaro portrays the people as one, pure, and virtuous entity. To play on this concept of “purity,” he articulates the idea of Christianity to resignify a notion of national culture according to his own interpretation, relying on the vagueness of “Christian values” to create a frame package that “guides his viewers on how to interpret reality” (Tamaki et al. 2021b). The “people,” therefore, is framed as responsible for a “miracle,” but only those who hold traditional and conservative values and are religious—especially Christians. Beyond merely uniting Brazilians and Americans, Bolsonaro’s construction of “the people” transcends borders, it is transnational, as they are all part of this same vulnerable group adversely impacted by political elites and their oppressive (and selfish) policies. This would not be exclusive to Brazil, but would also extend across the globe, particularly in regions where the “left” holds power or contest elections. Finally, in contrast to “the people,” we have “the elite,” represented by the “left” both ideologically and politically. This overarching threat is present not only in Brazil but also in the United States and Venezuela.

When attacking ideological foes, Bolsonaro names the “left,” broadly referring to “previous Brazilian governments,” specifically the Workers’ Party administrations, and “corruption,” a label applied to the same previous administrations whose members have been involved in corruption scandals. The term “ideology” is also frequently present, often alongside “communism” and “socialism,” which appear in his cultural war narrative as enemies haunting Latin America. Nevertheless, while the latter is objectively traceable, the former two are somewhat generic. However, it is possible to infer that those whose freedom is threatened, in this specific case, are the Brazilian people. It follows:

¹¹ Original passage in Portuguese: “Agora, acredito que a grande transformação no Brasil vem das mãos de Deus, primeiro, (...) e depois o outro milagre, por ocasião das eleições (sua vitória eleitoral em 2018); que o povo brasileiro - muito parecido com o povo americano: um povo conservador, temendo a Deus, portanto, cristão, e que não aceitava mais lá (nos Estados Unidos), (...) o crescimento da esquerda e o exemplo negativo da Venezuela (...).”

*Reestablishing democracy in Venezuela is a shared interest between our countries/governments. The Venezuelan dictatorial regime belongs to an international coalition known as Foro de São Paulo, which was near to getting to power in all countries in Latin America. Through democratic means, we got rid of this project in Brazil.*¹² (Bolsonaro, Washington, March 19, 2019)

Interestingly, when addressing foreign audiences, Bolsonaro's enemies are transnational,¹³ an overarching threat that, although limited, at first, to a national context, in the end, threatens other countries such as Venezuela. The enemies are usually generic, but the context allows one to figure out whom he refers to when speaking. Aside from generic naming, like "politically correct ones," "the left," "old politics," and "politicians," he sometimes names enemies like the former Brazilian Presidents Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (elected again in 2022) and Dilma Rousseff, and the Workers' Party. There are also attacks on the state, the media, and minorities, such as indigenous and quilombola people, when the topic is land demarcation, and LGBTQIA+ people when discussing "gender ideology." In the international context, though, the latter is less common¹⁴ since the main target is public policy decision-making made by previous administrations. Still, even if referring to a national context, Bolsonaro expands beyond Brazil, implying many times that they (the "elite") are part of a bigger "international coalition known as Foro de São Paulo," or São Paulo Forum, which is a conference of left-wing parties and other organizations from the Americas, mainly Latin America and the Caribbean.

When considering the international elites, Bolsonaro had attacked Venezuela, Cuba, Nicolás Maduro, Hugo Chávez, and Fidel Castro, aside from a generic Latin American left, especially during the Argentinean 2019 elections. Bolsonaro had visited Mauricio Macri, who was running for reelection against Alberto Fernandez and Cristina Kirchner and pleaded to the Argentinean audience to vote for Macri. These speeches

¹²Original passage in Portuguese: "o restabelecimento da democracia na venezuela é de interesse comum dos nossos governos. o regime ditatorial venezuelano faz parte de uma coligação internacional, conhecida como foro de são paulo, que esteve próximo de conquistar o poder em toda américa latina. pela via democrática, nos livramos desse projeto no brasil."

¹³Although "[r]eferences to a transnational elite in themselves do not make populism transnational," according to de Cleen et al. (2020).

¹⁴In national speeches these subjects appear more frequently (see Ricci & Venturelli, 2023).

mentioned structural problems in Latin America caused by left-wing administrations, as the example illustrates:

*My friend Macri faces difficulties and see the probability of the last president [Cristina Kirchner] coming back to power. She used to be friends with PT [Brazilian Workers' Party], [Hugo] Chávez, [Nicolás] Maduro, and Fidel Castro, among others, who dreamed, wished and have shown determination not only to steal our country but to steal our freedom.*¹⁵ (Bolsonaro, speech in Dallas, May 16th, 2019)

CONCLUSION

Building upon our analysis of Bolsonaro's populism, this chapter has provided a nuanced examination of his international rhetoric. Our analysis sought to uncover the markers of Bolsonaro's international populism and how his discourse travels across borders, influencing his overall populist agenda. By delving into Bolsonaro's speeches outside of Brazil, we aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how populist politicians utilize national, international, and transnational elements to mobilize support in various contexts. Ultimately, our analysis contributes to the broader conversation on the nature of populism and its impact on global politics.

Our results highlight the defining features of Bolsonaro's populism internationally. Bolsonaro's idea of "people" is the same across borders (transnational), but usually, he equates "the people" to whichever country he is visiting (international). Through national elements, such as symbols, values, and identities, Bolsonaro rallies those who share his ideals of Christianity, conservatism, and heteronormativity, building "the people" in opposition to the broad and generic "left" ideology. National elements are used as a way to appeal to the emotions and identity of the people, as well as to create a sense of unity and common purpose among the supporters. In the case of the far-right, these elements often center around the idea of the nation as a pure and homogenous entity, threatened by external forces such as immigration, globalization, and liberal values. In Bolsonaro's case, what poses the greatest threat (and basically the only one

¹⁵Original passage in Portuguese: "o meu amigo macri enfrenta dificuldades e vê crescer a possibilidade de uma presidente ultima voltar ao poder. essa que era amiga do pt. no brasil, de chavez, de maduro, dentre outros, além de fidel castro, que tinham mais que um sonho, a vontade e a determinação de, mais do que roubar o nosso país, roubar a liberdade de todos nós."

present in his speech) would be the liberal values, manifested through feminism (and gender-related issues) and homosexuality. Both would allegedly undermine the survival of the “traditional family,” the nucleus of the nation. Ultimately, Bolsonaro shapes and frames the enemy as a generic threat to liberty and the status quo. In this case, the left-wing ideology is often treated as an overarching menace that is not limited to Brazil but extends itself to other countries as well.

Overall, Bolsonaro’s populism is part of a larger far-right wave that has been gaining momentum worldwide. His rhetoric and tactics often align with those of other far-right politicians, who use similar strategies to appeal to disenchanted voters and gain political power.

His use of national elements as transnational identity markers also serves a strategic purpose. As is the case for other far-right leaders, by linking his Nationalist agenda with global issues and trends, Bolsonaro can tap into a broader sense of resentment and frustration that transcends national boundaries. This allows him to build alliances and draw on support and resources beyond Brazil. At the same time, he is positioned as part of a broader global movement.

Finally, our preliminary results raise some questions. First, has this pattern persisted over the final two years of his administration? In order to advance his agenda in Congress, Bolsonaro has formed coalitions with minor parties since 2020. These actions are consistent with a decline in his populist appeals in 2020 compared to 2019. Second, did Bolsonaro’s image abroad change in light of the general elections in Brazil in 2022? Bolsonaro has received criticism from the media and other Chief Executives worldwide. He has demonstrated ambiguous acts to improve his reputation: on the one hand, expressing worries for freedom and democracy and, on the other hand, maintaining his ideological and cultural narrative. These queries have no immediate answers, but they establish a course for future investigation.

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Populists' Foreign Policy Rhetoric: More Confrontational, Less Consensual?

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INTRODUCTION

Among foreign policy observers and in the media, one common assumption about populists' foreign policy is that it will be more confrontational as compared to that of non-populist governments. The bellicose and occasionally abusive tone of populist leaders of all stripes, from Orbán to Chávez, confirms this impression. Populist leaders frequently use undiplomatic or offensive language. Rodrigo Duterte called both the

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Pope and Barack Obama a ‘son of a bitch’ and showed his middle finger in response to the European Union criticizing his human rights record. More telling still, if there was anything like a Trump Doctrine in foreign policy, according to a White House official, it was ‘We’re America, bitch’ (Goldberg, 2018). Indeed, the populist US President in his diplomacy simultaneously (and, as many observers argued, irrationally) burned bridges with allies and foes alike, contributing to the impression that a shift towards a more confrontational foreign policy rhetoric takes place once populists come to power.

Yet, beyond these prominent cases, we still do not have any systematic knowledge about whether and how the formation of populist governments leads to shifts in foreign policy rhetoric vis-à-vis other international actors. Indeed, our previous research suggests that shifts to populist governments do not automatically lead to indiscriminately more aggressive foreign policy discourses and that we should be careful about generalizing on the basis of insights from high-profile but possibly idiosyncratic cases like the US under Trump or Hungary under Orbán (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019). To learn more about how populism affects a country’s foreign policy discourse, we systematically track shifts in the tone of government representatives from non-populist and populist governments from four countries (India, Italy, the Philippines, and Turkey) in their interactions with the representatives of a set of selected foreign governments. An in-depth qualitative content analysis of altogether 447 original-language official statements and documents from populist governments and their respective non-populist predecessors in our four country cases serves to assess changes in foreign policy rhetoric along a continuum of aggressive/confrontational to cooperative/consensual statements. We find that populist governments did not adopt a more aggressive language across the board. Whereas populist leaders broke diplomatic protocol by using offensive language or unexpectedly escalated conflicts in some cases, continuity and diplomatic rhetoric prevailed in others. Our careful

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selection of three bilateral relations sampled per case allows for identifying important context conditions that contribute to or inhibit the adoption of more confrontational rhetoric in bilateral relations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As outlined in the introduction to this volume, the study of populism allows for different theoretical approaches. For different reasons, all of them would lead us to expect populist governments to adopt a more conflictual tone in international affairs. The currently dominating ideational approach to populism emphasizes how populists divide societies into two separated groups, the 'people' and the 'elite' (Mudde, 2004), and point out that populists tend to have a Manichean worldview, to simplify things, and to depict the world as a battle of good vs. evil (Hawkins, 2009, p. 1043). This is likely to make populists especially confrontational, including in international politics: compromises are difficult to imagine in a black-and-white world. Moreover, populists' claim to be the very embodiment of the true people (Urbinati, 2019) might induce them to be less amenable to compromise in international disputes. If the presumed will of the people is absolute, it is difficult to backtrack on certain positions. Several authors also highlight that populists face a very peculiar dilemma once they come to power and form governments: they become themselves the political elite, and they therefore need to devise new ways of mobilizing their supporters (Müller, 2017; Urbinati, 2019). Foreign policy issues can be especially useful for domestic political mobilization as they may help unite the 'people' against external 'others'. The literature on the rally-around-the-flag effect has long shown how international conflicts can be used to generate domestic support (Tir, 2010), and this tendency can be expected to be reinforced under populist governments. This will therefore also contribute to making populists more likely to use confrontational rhetoric.

Studies that conceptualize populism as a style (Moffitt, 2016) or that highlight its performative elements would reach similar expectations about populist rhetoric. Populist leaders will want to appear close to the masses and authentic in their claim to represent the 'people'—and therefore could be expected to reject the diplomatic conventions of established foreign policy elites and instead to adopt a more direct and confrontational rhetoric. The desire to break with the past policies of a despised elite (Panizza & Miorelli, 2009, p. 40) might further lead populists to subvert

cooperative foreign relationships (but it may also induce rapprochement with countries that have been shunned by previous foreign policy elites). Relatedly, the marginalization of foreign policy bureaucracies that we observe across populist governments (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019) implies a side-lining of those actors who are traditionally in charge of keeping alive good working relationships with foreign countries. Moreover, we expect that centralization and personalization, with their concomitant marginalization of alternative voices in foreign policy issues, contribute to a more prominent role attributed to populists' specific thick ideologies, some of which may call for more conflictive international relationships. Finally, personalization also allows for other individual characteristics to be impactful. For instance, a highly personalized foreign policy decision-making process devoid of dissenters may contribute to an 'illusion of invulnerability' overestimating a country's capabilities (Badie, 2010, pp. 291–292), thereby also making conflict more likely.

METHODOLOGY

In our empirical analysis, we consider four countries that recently experienced a transition from a non-populist to a populist government: India, Italy, the Philippines, and Turkey. Populist governments are defined according to the above-mentioned understanding of populism as a thin ideology that entails the constitutive dimensions of anti-elitism and people-centrism. These are particularly prominent and undisputed cases that display variation across several theoretically relevant dimensions, from the thick ideology that is combined with populism to a country's structural position in the international system to populist governments' duration in power.

In India, we compare the two terms in office of the non-populist United Progressive Alliance government (2004–2014) with the populist government of Prime Minister Modi (2014–2021). The 'thick' ideology espoused by Modi's BJP is *right-wing Hindu-nationalism*, which focuses on the notion of *Hindutva*—the equation of Indian identity with Hindu civilization and Hinduism (Jaffrelot, 2017).

Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan served as prime minister for three terms (2003–2007, 2007–2011, 2011–2014). In 2014, he was elected President of Turkey, and, after a contentious constitutional reform, he was sworn in as Executive President in July 2018. The thick ideology embraced by Erdoğan and his AKP has been labelled '*Muslim nationalism*' (White,

2013), as opposed to his predecessors' secular (allegedly 'elitist') Kemalism. Turkey is a special case due to the populist leader's length in power. In line with recent area specific literature, we presume Erdoğan turned populist only after several years in office (e.g., Kaliber & Kaliber, 2019; Sözen, 2019). We recognize this—and explore it further—by sampling not only (non-populist) pre-AKP speeches (1999–2002) but also two separate sets of speeches from within Erdoğan's tenure, i.e., non-populist AKP (2003–2011) and populist (2011–2022).

Italy allows us to study a populist government with a *mixed thick ideology*. The focus is on the coalition government of the League and the Five Star Movement (June 2018–September 2019), which combined a radical right populist party with one whose thick ideology is 'more difficult to classify' (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017, p. 410). Despite its short duration in power, this case provides enough material to study changes in Italy's foreign policy rhetoric as compared to the preceding non-populist government of the Partito Democratico under Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni in power from December 2016 to May 2018.

Finally, in the Philippines, the election of President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 marked the return to a populist government after a non-populist phase under Aquino since 2010. Duterte did not combine his populism with a full-fledged thick ideology, but rather with *inconsistent and unclear ideological elements*. His anti-establishment attitude was paired with a provocative political style, disregard for institutional checks and balances, and with anti-pluralism targeted at drug dealers and users (Thompson, 2016, p. 51).

To determine the impact populism has on a government's foreign policy, and specifically on its rhetoric, we seek to compare changes from non-populist to populist governments across cases. Hence, we first conducted four within-case comparisons. For each case, we selected three bilateral relationships that for geographical, historical, and other reasons played central roles in foreign affairs (see Table 15.1). This included at least one (important) neighbouring state (Iran for Turkey, Bangladesh for India, Indonesia for the Philippines, France for Italy). Moreover, for each case we included a relationship that had a security dimension to it or that was particularly tense: India's relations with its archenemy Pakistan, China for the Philippines, Libya for Italy, and Russia for Turkey. Finally, we looked at economically and politically important relations with major extra-regional

Table 15.1 Cases and bilateral relations

	<i>Time period</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>No. of documents</i>	<i>Bilateral relations</i>
India	2004–2014	Prime Minister Manmohan Singh/United Progressive Alliance (UPA I and II)	84	Pakistan China Bangladesh
	2014–2021	Prime Minister Narendra Modi/National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	55	
Italy	12/2016–05/2018	Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni	31	USA
	06/2018–09/2019	Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte	25	France Libya
The Philippines	2010–2016	President Benigno Aquino III	50	USA
	2016–2022	President Rodrigo Duterte	52	China Indonesia
Turkey	1999–2002	Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit/Non-Populist DSP government (coalition of three parties)	30	Germany Russia Iran
	2003–2011	Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan/Non-populist AKP government	60	
	2011–2022	Prime Minister, President Erdoğan/Populist AKP government	60	

powers, i.e., the US for Italy and the Philippines, Germany for Turkey, and China for India.¹

For each case, we also considered populists' 'thick' ideologies; thus, we sought to include cases for which we could reasonably expect that populists' thick ideology would matter. For instance, Hindu-nationalists in India for long blamed Muslim-majority Bangladesh for illegal migration, and the AKP's Muslim nationalism contrasts with Iran's Shiite fundamentalism (Fradkin & Libby, 2013). With this careful selection of bilateral relations, we sought to learn more about relevant context conditions as well as the extent to which populism matters in reshaping foreign policy rhetoric.

For each non-populist and populist government, we selected speeches and statements on each of the three bilateral relations held by

¹ China is both a direct neighbour to India with a long border and a major power outside India's immediate region that is South Asia.

representatives of the respective government.² The exact number of speeches per case and bilateral relation varied along with data availability, but we paid attention to keep the number of documents comparable between non-populist and populist governments in each case. We ended up with between 56 speeches for the shorter Italian case and 150 for the much longer Turkish case totalling 447 speeches altogether (see Table 15.1). The speeches were analysed by our team of native-speaking co-authors via a qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) supported by the software MaxQDA. In our analysis, we were interested in finding out whether populist governments adopt a more confrontational, less cooperative rhetoric as compared to non-populist governments when they address other governments. Our coding frame entailed four categories: criticism, negative call for action, friendly gesture, and positive call for action (see Table 3 in appendix). We developed our codes in an iterative process with several rounds of test coding, extensive discussions among our team members, and repeated adjustments to the coding frame. Since our analysis focuses on diplomatic statements, we first identified the categories *criticism* and *friendly gesture*, which are relatively straightforward: *criticism* implies a negative assessment of the counterpart's policies, while *friendly gesture* refers to statements that entail appreciation or flattering. Both categories, however, do not come along with a concrete request for policy changes on the part of the other government. Therefore, we added to our coding frame two more categories that allow us to give appropriate weight in the analysis to the common practice of asking another government (not) to do something, or to express expectations directed at it. In fact, these are essential elements if we want to assess whether rhetoric in bilateral relations was more cooperative or confrontational. To this end, we created the categories *negative call for action* and *positive call for action*. Both tend to be concrete: for instance, positive calls for action demand cooperation in a specific area and thus are often more meaningful than mere friendly gestures. The same goes for negative calls for action. Rather than stating a government's usually well-known critique, e.g., over another government's trade policy or border management, a negative call for action typically includes a warning or threat. More than the other two categories, calls for action are attempts in exercising power internationally. We found their prevalence striking enough to justify separate categories.

²We did not only focus on individual populist leaders as we are interested in overall changes in a government's foreign policy.

By measuring the frequency of friendly gestures and positive calls for action versus criticism and negative calls for action and by comparing the percentage shares of such codes between the non-populist and the populist government speech samples for each bilateral relationship, we identify whether the shift to a populist government has led to the expected more confrontational rhetoric. In-depth qualitative comparisons of the rhetoric and language used in each of the 12 bilateral relationships help us to contextualize our findings and to identify case-specific peculiarities of populist discourse.³

DOGS THAT BARK A LOT: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS FROM INDIA, ITALY, THE PHILIPPINES, AND TURKEY

General Trends

Our qualitative content analysis of 12 bilateral relations across four country cases reveals that, overall, a shift to a populist government led to the adoption of a more confrontational language, but that there are important exceptions (see Fig. 15.1). For the cases of India, Italy, and the Philippines, the share of the codes *criticism* and *negative call for action* generally increased with a shift to a populist government. The increase was most striking in India's approach towards Pakistan and also quite visible in Italy's approach to Libya and France. By contrast, we observed a decline in these negative elements of rhetoric in Italy's approach to the US, at that time governed by populist President Trump. In some cases, the increase in *criticism* and *negative call for action* was surprisingly moderate: despite India's major bilateral tensions with China and Prime Minister Modi's party's anti-Muslim electoral platform, his addresses to both China and Muslim-majority Bangladesh were not much more aggressive than under his predecessor (see below). In his initial years as president, Duterte in the Philippines surprised observers and members of his own cabinet with his conciliatory tone vis-à-vis China—mirrored by a considerably more confrontational language towards the US (then still under President Obama), a longstanding ally and security guarantor. In the case of Turkey, we analysed two shifts: from the non-populist government of Ecevit (1999–2002) to the early non-populist years of Erdoğan's AKP government (2002–2011), to the populist AKP era (2011–present). The graphs reveal

³ All translations, if not indicated otherwise, are by the authors.

individual relationships that became more confrontational, and later a discussion of the less straightforward cases, will help us in making sense of the variation.

Worsening Relations

Amongst those bilateral relationships that became more confrontational, the worsening of India-Pakistan relations under Hindu-Nationalist Prime Minister Modi is the least surprising. Bilateral relations between the two nuclear-armed nations have always been contentious since their independence in 1947. The predominant issue has been cross-border terrorism and Pakistan's fuelling of separatism in the former Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir. Nonetheless, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government (non-populist, 2004–2014) sought to resolve bilateral issues through dialogue. Investing substantial political capital, he carried forward the so-called Composite Dialogue between the two countries until the Mumbai terror attacks of 2008 made it politically impossible to continue. After a short-lived attempt at rapprochement culminating in an unexpected visit to Pakistan in late 2015, Narendra Modi (populist, 2014–2021) took a very stern, outspoken position to convey that 'talks and terror can't go together' (FE Online, 2018). Other aspects in bilateral relations were either not discussed, or the relationship worsened—for instance India revoked Pakistan's most-favoured-nation status in trade relations (India Today Web Desk, 2019). Not surprisingly, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) only lists 18 addresses concerning Pakistan under Modi (all of which consist mostly of staunch 'criticisms' and 'negative calls for action') until August 2021. By contrast, the MEA lists 92 speeches under Singh (many of which include 'friendly gestures'—largely absent under Modi), illustrating Singh's much greater willingness to engage with Pakistan. Modi's hard-line position is also evident in his rhetoric, which is sometimes imbued with mockery and ridicule, as in calling Pakistan 'terroristan' (Ministry of External Affairs, 2017b). Negative calls for action also fall on the same line, as for instance in demanding Pakistan to 'rein in its compulsive hostility towards India' (Ministry of External Affairs, 2017a). This was rarely the case under Singh, whose rhetoric remained nuanced and focused on concrete policy developments.

Italy's relations with France are another interesting case of a worsening relationship, albeit one that is more surprising given that both countries are founding members of the EU and NATO allies. Whereas the

non-populist Gentiloni government did not overtly criticize France or issue negative calls for action, the populist Conte government was openly critical of France and of President Macron in particular. Criticism did not come so much from PM Conte but rather by the leading figures of the two parties forming the governing coalition: Interior Minister Matteo Salvini of the Lega and the Minister for the Economy and Labour Luigi Di Maio of the Five Star Movement. Each of them focused on issues dear to his respective electoral base. Salvini attacked 'the French' in the name of the 'Italian people' when criticizing French government actions or statements, among others on migration-related issues (Cremonesi, 2018). Di Maio criticized the French government's welfare policies—paradoxically in the name of the *French* people against the French President (Di Maio, 2019). One month before, Di Maio had met a leader of the French 'yellow vests', who had called for the military to overthrow Macron. In response to this highly controversial move, France recalled its ambassador in Rome (Darnis, 2017, p. 4). Attacking the presidency of a traditional ally therefore became a playing field that allowed Italy's populist coalition partners to differentiate their positions ahead of the European elections (Darnis, 2017, p. 4).

Turkey's pre-AKP government's tone vis-à-vis Germany emphasized the close trade relationship and the strong bonds emerging from the presence of Turkish migrant workers in Germany. Especially after Turkey's formal recognition as a candidate for EU membership in the wake of the Helsinki summit in 1999, the rhetoric became even friendlier, presumably due to the support of the Schröder government for Turkey's EU accession—and it remained so in the early years of the AKP government. A buzzword of the non-populist AKP period (2003–2011) was win-win cooperation. In the populist era, after 2011, however, criticism of Germany increased dramatically (see Fig. 15.1). This reflected Erdoğan's more general domestic mobilization strategy based on a discourse hostile towards the 'West' and claiming that Turkey was a victim of obscure designs of foreign enemies (Destradi et al., 2022). The Islam-West dualism and the disadvantageous treatment of Turks emerged as a recurring theme in presidential speeches. Foreign ministers Davutoglu and Cavusoglu also picked up on this narrative, but they usually employed a more sober and technocratic language. The most bellicose language is to be found in speeches about Germany held after the failed coup attempt against Erdoğan in 2016, as in this example: '[T]he government that provides shelter to Turkish terrorists in Germany must first be held accountable. Why are

terrorists [putschists] fleeing from Turkey to Germany? How will they [Germans] explain the financial support given to them there? And how will Germany explain the PKK [...] being able to demonstrate on its streets under the protection of the German police?’ (Turkish Presidency, 2017). This hints at the function of these speeches for domestic political mobilization, with Erdoğan adopting an increasingly aggressive rhetoric in response to domestic challenges to his government.

We also found a straightforward change in the rhetoric used by the governments of the Philippines vis-à-vis the US. Our *criticism* code increased from zero in the material from the non-populist government of Aquino to 33% of all coded segments in that of the populist government of Duterte. Indeed, in the Philippines’ public statements, the approach to the US took a turn from classifying Washington as a reliable ally and ‘a true friend’ (Official Gazette, 2013) during Aquino’s term, to denigrating the US as a ‘former colonial master’ (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2016) under Duterte, coupled with adamant calls for reducing dependency on the US. Under the non-populist leadership, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) also openly addressed tensions with China to gain support in the South China Sea while implicitly referring to the US as a security guarantor: ‘The goals of US and China are so diametrically opposed, the outcome of the contest is capable of impacting international order’ (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2015). By contrast, Duterte argued in favour of settling disputes with China bilaterally, rather than involving other actors like the US or ASEAN. Duterte’s very antagonistic relationship with the US, however, did not last long. The government went back to the usual friendly rhetoric in 2021, as manifested in the line: ‘no challenge is insurmountable between long-standing allies and friends’ (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021). This was at the time when Duterte decided to retract his decision to terminate the Visiting Forces Agreement and the US reiterated their commitment to fulfil their obligations to the Philippines under the alliance (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021).

Also in several other cases, the shift to a populist government led to a less cooperative rhetoric, but this change was less stark than in the previously described four bilateral relations. For instance, Turkey’s statements addressing Iran became more critical under the populist AKP-government; however, as the conflict with Syria was escalating, clearly involving Iran, the tone remained surprisingly friendly. Similarly, the statements of the populist AKP-era on Russia entailed more instances of criticism and negative calls for action as compared to those of the non-populist periods

analysed. However, their tone remained sober, largely displaying continuity with previous phases. Apparently, there was no illusion on either side that the two nations could substantially resolve clashing interests in many issue areas. Neither was Ankara interested in escalating conflicts. Consequently, a rather technocratic language permeates almost all documents in our sample on both Russia and Iran. The case of Italy's approach towards Libya similarly displays a shift to a slightly less cooperative rhetoric. However, this case turned out to be difficult to analyse due to the multiplicity of addressees of Italian statements on Libya. The situation in Libya could not be unequivocally attributed to either of the two political forces with partial control over the country (i.e., Al Sarraj's Government of national accord or Haftar's National Liberation Army). Hence, the addressee of negative calls for action often remains vague for both governments.

Strategy and Salience: Where Populism Matters—And Where It Doesn't

In the cases discussed above, we observed the adoption of a more confrontational rhetoric, as we had expected it in theoretical terms. However, in several other cases developments were less straightforward. Italy's approach to the US is interesting in this regard, and it dovetails with Duterte's rapprochement to the US after Trump came to power. In fact, Italy's rhetoric vis-à-vis the US changed in the spirit of what could be called a populist international. This is most obvious when looking at friendly gestures. In the case of Italy, both the non-populist Gentiloni government and the populist Lega-Five Star Movement coalition government were confronted with President Trump. PM Gentiloni and Foreign Minister Alfano spoke about the solid partnership with the US and its importance. Populist PM Conte complimented Trump with more ease, pointing out similarities between their governments: 'My government and the Trump administration are both governments of change, chosen by the citizens to change the status quo and to bring improvement to their living conditions' (Palazzo Chigi, 2018). Elements of criticism were attributed to the 'United States' within complex formulations, and not to Trump directly. By contrast, Gentiloni's foreign minister Alfano had formulated simple and clear criticism explicitly addressing the Trump administration rather than the US more generally.

One surprising finding that does not conform to our expectation of populists adopting a more confrontational rhetoric concerns India's approach towards both China and Bangladesh. Populist PM Modi praised his country's friendly relations with Muslim-majority Bangladesh, despite his party's Hindu-Nationalist platform of anti-Muslim sentiments. Since the 1990s, India had sought to improve relations with Bangladesh, which have repeatedly been tainted by conflicts over issues like migration, the exchange of enclaves, water sharing, and lately communal violence. Under Modi, India's Bangladesh policy essentially remained unchanged. As a result, the countries reached important agreements over land and sea borders, infrastructure investments, transit rights for India, and gifting Covid vaccines (Plagemann, 2021). In terms of rhetoric, non-populist PM Singh mostly 'reported' on bilateral policy developments, expressed hope for more 'people-to-people' ties, and emphasized the countries' long shared history. Modi mixed these narratives with themes like friendship, historical ties, or other elements of intimacy. He spoke predominantly in Hindi, interspersed with quotations and rhymes in Bengali, thereby underlining cultural commonalities and trying to create an emotional bond with his audience (some of these rhetorical devices were also used by Singh, but to a much more limited extent).

India's bilateral relations with China suffer from unresolved border disputes and ongoing rivalries about spheres of influence in Asia. Singh nonetheless managed to engage in relatively constructive relations with China. In 2005 the two countries agreed to abide by their commitment to the five principles of mutual coexistence ('Panchsheel') and undertake confidence building measures. While Modi did not substantially deviate from the policies of his predecessor, he ostensibly took a more decisive stance when it came to military confrontations and built closer ties with the US, thereby threatening Chinese regional interests (Bajpai, 2018). In terms of rhetoric used, both Singh and Modi called on China for collaboration and expressed friendly gestures in neutral language. Both made references to Buddhism and civilizational ties, mentioning the need for 'people-to-people' exchanges. Representatives of the populist government also more often used the term 'friends' while addressing China, compared to members of the Singh government. In some cases, Modi expressed criticism vis-à-vis China, but we could not trace an increase in confrontational rhetoric that would reflect the *de facto* and dramatic worsening of bilateral relations following a series of border clashes with dozens of dead Indian soldiers in 2020. Rather than further fuelling a conflict with a more

powerful opponent, Modi chose not to escalate tensions. This points to an ultimately very strategic use of diplomatic language by a populist government.

The Philippines' approach to China similarly did not entail the expected shift towards a less cooperative rhetoric. Non-populist President Aquino had taken a confrontational approach, filing the arbitration on the South China Sea before the Permanent Court of Arbitration and criticizing China's expansionist activities in the disputed areas as 'illegal' and a 'gross violation' (e.g., Department of Foreign Affairs, 2013). There were also clear attempts to relate the dispute to a bigger audience—that of ASEAN and the wider international community (Tiezzi, 2014). Duterte did not follow this course early in his presidency. Instead, he adopted a more friendly approach towards China, which was reflected in his use of words like 'good friend' to refer to the Chinese President Xi Jinping (Presidential Communications Operations Office, 2018). Since Duterte visited China more frequently than Aquino, he also gave more speeches addressing China. His statements exuded trust-building efforts, friendship, and were geared towards funnelling more investments to the Philippines. During the initial years of Duterte's presidency, the South China Sea issue was banned from official discourse. However, Duterte's cabinet started denouncing the activities of China in the disputed areas early on. At the 2021 ASEAN-China Summit Duterte himself criticized China and said 'We abhor the recent event in the Ayungin Shoal and view with grave concern other similar developments' (Presidential Communications Operations Office, 2021). This was a shift not just in terms of the content but also in terms of the speaker and venue as previously only cabinet members of the populist government (i.e., not the President himself) had criticized China, and that too only in a bilateral context. Overall, the case of the Philippines' rapprochement to China was part of a broader foreign-policy reorientation under the populist government of Duterte, that also included the worsening of relations with the US. This can be seen as an effort of emancipating the Philippines from the US as its traditional ally and of breaking with past policies of the governing elite. However, the later rapprochement with Trump reveals that such break was mainly rhetorical and short-lived. The Philippines' approach towards Indonesia did not display any substantive shift between the non-populist and the populist government—possibly because of the low salience of their largely uncontroversial relations for the domestic public.

CONCLUSION

We found support for our expectation that populist governments' rhetoric will be more confrontational than that of their non-populist predecessors in four within-case comparisons between non-populist and populist governments: those of India vis-à-vis Pakistan, Italy vis-à-vis France, the Philippines vis-à-vis the US, and Turkey vis-à-vis Germany. Some other cases also confirm the expected trend, albeit less visibly. By contrast, a shift to a more confrontational rhetoric was absent in the cases of Modi's surprisingly docile language on Bangladesh and China, the Five Star/Lega embrace of the Trump administration, and Duterte's rapprochement with China (and continuity towards Indonesia). Thus, there are some factors that offset the expected impact of populism. First, the bilateral relation's domestic salience to voters matters. Populist leaders can be expected to use foreign policy issues for domestic political mobilization, closely linking the international and the domestic. While addressing foreign governments, they always also address a domestic audience, and they seem to be very careful in choosing which topics to emphasize. Conflictive relations with the arch-enemy Pakistan were useful to mobilize supporters in line with the Hindu-Nationalist thick ideology. Criticism of Germany resonated with the sizeable Turkish diaspora and its network in Turkey. Blaming the 'imperial' US underscored Duterte's anti-elitism (even though, paradoxically, a majority of the public in the Philippines still had a more positive view of the US than of China in 2017, see Pew Research Center, 2017). Criticism of France also resonated with an Italian audience, and the Lega and the Five Star Movement tried to outdo each other in their criticism of the neighbouring country ahead of elections. Hence, future research will have to take a closer look into foreign policy matters' relevance for populists' support bases and their salience to the wider public.

In the cases that do not conform to our expectation, several factors seem to have mitigated the impact of populism. First, the potentially detrimental consequences of an excessive politicization of certain subjects might have been taken into account by populist governments. This may explain why Modi did not verbally attack China: in order not to provoke it, but also to avoid domestic pressures calling for a more muscular foreign policy with potentially disastrous consequences. The same might apply for Erdoğan's only moderately more critical approach towards Russia. Also, the fact that Duterte in the end did not turn away from the US seems to confirm that populists in power are not entirely impulsive and irrational.

In some cases, salience seems to play a crucial role: certain relationships were simply not salient enough to make it worthwhile to adopt a harsher and unnecessarily confrontational rhetoric. This might have been the case in India's approach towards Bangladesh, which unlike Pakistan does not figure prominently in voters' minds beyond West Bengal and other subnational states neighbouring Bangladesh. Likewise, the Philippines' rhetoric vis-à-vis Indonesia is not noteworthy, presumably because bilateral relations hardly matter to either Duterte's support base, or to the wider public. Finally, some of our cases reveal that populists' sympathies towards other populist leaders and governments might go well beyond photo-ops and touch upon more substantive aspects like diplomatic interactions—as in the case of Italy's changed approach to the US and Duterte's rapprochement to Washington after Trump had replaced Obama.

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Transatlantic Diplomacy in the Age of Populism: A Story of Resilience?

Emmanuelle Blanc

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the rise of populism has become a defining feature of world politics: from the Global South to the Western World through Turkey and Israel, populist leaders have appeared on the international stage with potentially disruptive consequences for the established international order and its institutions. Once in power, populist leaders take the reign of foreign policy, shaping the external relations of their states, and tend to engage in “undiplomatic diplomacy” (Cadier, 2019). In exploring the interplay between populism and international politics, scholars have so far assessed the impact of populism on the very substance of foreign policy showing that populism does not translate into a uniform type of foreign policy (Destradi et al., 2021)—even though the diversification of international partnerships appears to be a common characteristic across the board

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(Plagemann & Destradi, 2020). Research has also demonstrated that populism has important consequences for the style and processes of foreign policymaking—with the centralization and personification of foreign policy at the detriment of the professional diplomatic corps as the most documented aspect (Plagemann & Destradi, 2019).

In line with this volume's aim to interrogate the intersections of populist political communication, performative leadership, and international politics, this chapter discusses the extent to which populism (and populist communication in particular) affects diplomacy. In fact, "populism is not merely a performative spectacle to lure in voters and amplify grievances, but also a force to remake policies and effect structural change in the international system" (Lacatus, Meibauer & Löfflmann). The weakening of the professional diplomatic corps in favour of personalism at home and abroad, the preference for bilateral linkages at the detriment of multilateralism, and the provocative communication style are all part of the growing anti-diplomatic repertoire of practices used by populist leaders. Long present on the margins of the international system, these anti-diplomatic impulses have become prominent at the core, leading to "the generalized contestation of diplomacy" (Cooper, 2019b). Yet despite its saliency, we know very little about the impact of populist communication (i.e. discursive performance of populist ideas) on the conduct of traditional diplomacy. To what extent, and how then does populist communication affect diplomacy?

The impact of populism on diplomacy, being a key institution of international society, deserves to be scrutinized, as it is the stability of the international order that is at stake. We conceive diplomacy as one of the key institutions of international society, whose main function is to ensure the smooth management of International Relations (Watson, 1982). Diplomacy is essentially a communicative process, following the rules of conduct of diplomatic culture, aimed at reducing frictions among state representatives (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2013; Jönsson & Hall, 2005; Sharp, 2009). In the words of Tran (1987, p. 8) "communication is to diplomacy as blood is to the human body. Whenever communication ceases, the body of international politics, the process of diplomacy, is dead, and the result is violent conflict or atrophy". It is therefore crucial to go beyond the analysis of the impact of populism on the content and process of foreign policymaking and delve into how populist communication affects diplomacy. Section one outlines the emerging consensus in the literature according to which populism challenges the institution of diplomacy by highlighting a series of incompatibilities between these two sets of ideas and practices. It

then focuses on the impact of populist communication on the diplomatic practice of face-to-face dialogues in the transatlantic context by scrutinizing its evolution under the Trump administration. The analysis shows that while the presidential populist communication has changed the substance of transatlantic diplomatic exchanges, it has also triggered a strong response from new diplomatic actors—demonstrating the resilience of this fundamental institution.

POPULISM AND DIPLOMACY: A SET OF FUNDAMENTAL INCOMPATIBILITIES

Amid the numerous conceptualizations of populism as a thin-centred ideology (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013), a strategy (Barr, 2009; Weyland, 2001), discourse (Hawkins, 2009), or political style (Moffitt, 2016), a consensus exists according to which populism challenges the core tenets of traditional diplomacy (Cooper, 2019a; Surowiec & Miles, 2021). Based on existing research, this section reviews the ways through which populism—in its ideational and discursive/performative dimensions— affects the essence and practice of traditional diplomacy.

The Clash Between the Ideational Component of Populism and Diplomacy

First, populism—understood as a ‘thin-centred ideology’—clashes with the work of professional diplomats at the foreign policymaking stage. Key populist ideas, such as anti-elitism and anti-pluralism, are translated into anti-diplomatic practices, taking the form of the marginalization of Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the exclusion of diplomats from the foreign policymaking process. The populist idea of ‘anti-elitism’ is incompatible with the involvement of diplomats in the foreign policymaking process. Whereas diplomacy has long been perceived positively as providing continuity in terms of representing the national interest and identity, populist leaders cultivate a negative image of this institution (Cooper, 2019b, p. 801). Populist politicians oppose the pure people, which they claim to represent, to elites that they consider to be corrupted by their privileged position within the state (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). As Lequesne (2021, p. 782) explains, if we define a political-administrative elite as a group distinguished by the selective nature of its recruitment and

having a position of power within the state, the corps of career diplomats qualifies as such an elite. Therefore, diplomats are considered by populists as an integral part of the ‘corrupted’ elites—whose capacity for influence must be limited. For instance, during the Brexit campaign, populist politicians conveyed their anti-diplomatic aversion to communities of interest beyond the national level (Cooper, 2019b, p. 800). On the resignation of Sir Rogers (the UK permanent representative to the EU), the former UKIP leader Nigel Farage, said: ‘it would be appropriate if a lot more people in that position, British ambassadors, left. The world has changed, [which] the political establishment in this country and the diplomatic service just doesn’t accept’ (Guardian, 2017).

The second ideational populist element—“anti-pluralism”—also stands in opposition with the conventional role of career diplomats in the foreign policy formulation. Populist leaders are generally not interested in the input of others (including professionals of foreign policy, like diplomats). Difference is not tolerated, as witnessed in the US case by the firing of Steve Goldstein, the US State Department’s Under-Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, when he contradicted the White House’s account of US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s departure (Cooper, 2019a, p. 43). The reluctance to take other views into account (“sole representative of the people”) goes hand in hand with the distrust of the complicated nature of policy solutions, requiring consultations, reviews, and lengthy iterative design (Moffitt, 2016). Populists favour swift action rather than ‘slow politics’ of negotiation and deliberation (Saward, 2011)—key foundational tasks of diplomacy. In the same vein, populist governments express a strong aversion towards experts and deny expert knowledge. This ideational trait of populism runs against the self-definition of the corps of career diplomats, as a group of experts who help streamline diplomatic decisions by mastering rational knowledge (Lequesne, 2021, p. 782)—further putting on a collision course populist governments and professional diplomats.

Following these ideas, populist leaders engage in the deterioration of professional diplomacy in favour of personalism and megaphone diplomacy. The numerous attempts to marginalize professional diplomats and MFAs have been well-documented (Coticchia, 2021; Lequesne, 2021). Depending on the institutional conditions prevailing in each national context, populist governments in Europe affect the bureaucratic autonomy of career diplomats through political capture—a concept used to describe how a ruling clan can seize democratic institutions to project its own

interests onto the state (Crabtree & Durand, 2017; Lequesne, 2021). The practice of public diplomacy has also been impacted by populist leaders, like Donald Trump—who eroded the logic of genuine relationship-building with foreign audiences and exploited this diplomatic practice to further his domestic interests—thereby weakening diplomacy (Surowiec & Miles, 2021, p. 7). By diminishing the involvement of career diplomats as mediators and directly addressing foreign audiences, populist leaders touch upon the very essence of diplomacy as an exercise of mediation (Lequesne, 2021).

Importantly, populist leaders manage to instil a pervasive culture of distrust towards diplomacy within their respective population. The view that foreign service officers have a unique ability to interpret the national interest coupled with a diplomatic culture that highlights the separation of diplomats from citizens plays into the populist rhetoric. For significant segments of the society, diplomacy is thus perceived as a constraining force, part of a self-serving and controlling establishment (Cooper, 2019b).

The Clash Between the Discursive/Performative Dimensions of Populism and Diplomacy

The discursive and performative dimensions of populism pose additional challenges to diplomacy. Diplomacy, as a key institution of the international society, consists of a communicative process, designed to facilitate the smooth management of International Relations. A code of conduct has therefore developed to lead mediation efforts to fruition (Watson, 1982, p. 14; Sharp, 2009). It entails the continuous exchange of ideas and attempts to find mutually acceptable solutions to conflicts of interest while increasing awareness and demonstrating respect for other people's points of views. As Holbrooke (1998, p. 116) attests, "the normal pattern in international diplomacy is of outward cordiality masking animosity".

However, it is precisely this diplomatic culture—that is, the 'accumulated communicative and representational norms, rules, and institutions devised to improve relations and avoid war between interacting and mutually recognizing political entities' (Wiseman, 2005, p. 409), that populist leaders fail to respect. From a discursive perspective, populist leaders thrive on the themes of crisis, breakdown, and threats, which contrast with the conventional diplomatic discourse conveying stability, compromise, and moderation (Moffitt, 2016). Populist leaders also share a tendency towards expressions of non-cooperation and the use of threats as a means of

persuasion in international fora, while not excluding to shift to cooperative strategies if needed (Thiers & Wehner in this volume). In terms of performance, populists indulge in “undiplomatic” diplomacy, disregarding appropriate modes of acting in politics (Cadier). Populists’ bad manners emphasize agitation, spectacular acts, exaggeration, and calculated provocations (Moffitt, 2016). For instance, instead of courtesy and constructive ambiguity, Trump has developed a confrontational style in his diplomatic communication—particularly so on Twitter. For Šimunjak and Caliandro (2019), it co-constructs instability and uncertainty within US soft power statecraft. At Trump’s operational style’s core is a winner-take-all approach to any external engagement, in which asymmetrical structural advantages are translated into transactional leverage. The goal is not to stabilize institutions or to enhance followership among strategic allies or commercial partners, but to extract material advantages on a self-help basis within a zero-sum perspective of confrontational politics (Cooper, 2019b, p. 41).

In short, populism—both in its ideational, discursive, and performative dimensions—clashes with traditional diplomacy. Populist ideas of ‘anti-elitism’ and ‘anti-pluralism’ lead to anti-diplomatic practices hindering the diplomats’ input in the foreign policymaking process. Populist discursive and performative components are equally incompatible with the conventional diplomatic code of conduct designed to ensure the smooth management of International Relations in the respect of others—constituting a further challenge to the role of diplomats at the implementation stage. These incompatibilities between populism and diplomacy thus suggest that the key institution of diplomacy will inevitably be weakened. But is it really the case?

THE IMPACT OF POPULIST COMMUNICATION ON THE DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE OF DIALOGUE: TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUES UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

While the previous discussion has highlighted the incompatibilities between populism and traditional diplomacy, more fine-grained analyses are needed to accurately assess the impact of populism on this key institution, which encompasses diverse practices. Hence, this part zooms in on the impact of populist communication on one of the key practices of

diplomacy, that is, dialogue—defined as “a face-to-face interaction in an institutionalized framework” (Blanc, 2018). Diplomacy refers to various practices ranging from speech writing, negotiations, information gathering, and Twitter messaging to name just a few (Pouliot & Cornut, 2015). We focus here on dialogue, as it remains a staple of world politics despite the advance of cheaper technological communication means. Diplomatic dialogues matter, as they fulfil important functions: they can be used as a way to coerce (Fierke, 1999), as an engine for cooperation through information exchange (Keohane, 1988), and as a process of persuasion and arguing, leading to shared understandings (Risse, 2000). Dialogues also matter from an identity-based perspective, as they provide a means through which the recognition of one’s identity is sought, granted, and routinized (Blanc, 2021). When basic understandings at the core of the relationship are challenged, dialogues can also serve to provide reassurance and reinforce ontological security (Blanc, 2020). Depending on the strength of the relationship, one function of the dialogue may prevail—reflecting the quality of the interaction. For instance, a dialogue whose main function is to coerce the other side using threats is more likely to characterize the interaction between enemies rather than allies. Conversely, a dialogue geared towards advancing close cooperation through an open exchange of ideas, suggests a more positive type of relationship of a higher quality.

We are interested here in understanding how populist communication—described as ‘the rocket fuel of populist parties and leaders’ (Sorensen, 2021)—impacts the practice of face-to-face dialogues. Populist communication is understood as a discursive frame (Aslanidis, 2016). Frames are ‘schemata of interpretation’ allowing their users to ‘locate, perceive, identify, and label’ complex events (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). Frames provide a diagnosis by identifying ‘some event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration’, then suggest a prognosis, that is, ‘a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done’ and conclude by circulating a motivational urgency to act (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 199). Accordingly, populist discourse disseminates a frame that diagnoses reality as problematic because ‘corrupt elites’ have unjustly usurped the sovereign authority of the ‘noble people’ and maintains that the solution lies in the righteous political mobilization of the latter to regain power. Populist frames are formal vessels of meaning typically adversarial and Manichean (Aslanidis, 2016, p. 99). Emotionality, specifically the attribution of blame, emphasizing anger and fear towards threatening political elites, prominently features in populist communication

(Fieschi & Heywood, 2004; Hameleers et al., 2017). In the most extreme form of “insult politics”, populist communication entails direct attacks to individuals or groups rather than criticism (Winberg, 2017).

Methodology

To what extent and how, then, does populist communication impact the practice of dialogue? To answer this question, we scrutinize the evolution of the transatlantic dialogues during the Trump administration (2017–2021). We selected this case study because of the intensity of Trump’s populist communication against Europe and the remarkable diplomatic apparatus of dialogues characterizing EU-US relations. Trump’s populist communication has challenged the foundations of the transatlantic relations in a way that no other US president had ever done (Cox & Stokes, 2018)—thereby testing the strength of the relationship. Secondly, the focus on dialogue in the transatlantic context is warranted, as the US and the EU have developed a multi-levelled architecture of dialogues unique in the history of diplomacy due to their special relationship (Ginsberg, 2001). In order to determine the extent to which and how the populist presidential communication affects the practice of EU-US dialogues, the analysis traces changes in the quality and quantity of the dialogues at different levels, including meetings between diplomats, lawmakers participating in the Transatlantic Legislators’ Dialogue (TLD) and civil society dialogues. The analysis is based on the scripts of forty semi-structured interviews conducted with European and US diplomats, lawmakers and civil society actors who participated in these dialogues.¹

Main Findings

Overall, the general trends depicted in the literature are reflected in the case of the transatlantic dialogues: Anti-diplomatic impulses—that is, the marginalization of the diplomatic corps and the violation of conventional diplomatic norms—directly affect the practice of dialogue between

¹ Interviews were conducted between December 2015 and June 2019 with a representative sample of participants (EEAS/EU Commission and US State Department officials, members of the EP and Congress, and members of the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue and Transatlantic Business Dialogue). As most participated in dialogues under the Obama and Trump administration, they could comment on the changing nature of the dialogues.

representatives of the EU and their US counterparts. Specifically, the presidential populist communication changes the substance (i.e. quality) of the transatlantic diplomatic exchanges—shifting their functions from the promotion of high-level cooperation towards clarification, reassurance, and recognition. Yet, the analysis also shows that the presidential populist communication has triggered a strong response from new diplomatic actors—in terms of quantity, demonstrating the resilience of this fundamental institution.

*Trump's Communication in the Transatlantic Context
as a Populist Discursive Frame*

The analysis of Trump's rhetoric vis-à-vis the EU features key characteristics of populist communication—understood as a discursive frame. The restoration of a long-gone respect for the US as a superpower worthy of admiration and fear by fellow states has been the main rhetorical claim motivating Trump's foreign policy position ("Make America Great Again"). Already during his election campaign, Trump proposed an image of the US as an international power taken for granted by other states and in need of strengthening its national security (Lacatus, 2019). He promised to free the US from the burden of serving as the guarantor of the international liberal order and pledged to sign 'good trade deals' (Chrysosgelos, 2017), rescuing the USA from the threat that international liberal elites pose to national sovereignty and domestic economic prosperity (Boucher & Thies, 2019). Trump's populist approach to foreign policy has been marked by a move away from the core principles of the post-war US global project—commitment to open trade, and engagement with multilateral rules and institutions for the advancement of the Liberal International Order. Driven by a strong scepticism regarding the US' capacity to support a liberal order, Trump presented the domestic and global liberal elites as being responsible for 'bad trade deals' and the use of US financial and military resources to advance other states' causes to the detriment of the best interest of 'the American people' (Lacatus, 2021, p. 33). This populist discursive frame was also enacted in the transatlantic context. Trump claimed that trade agreements like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) were 'bad deals' that favoured the economic success of other states by moving jobs away from the disenfranchised industrial areas of the American Midwest. Similarly, the diagnostic frame emphasizing the US's unfair exploitation, attributing blame to

international elites has been applied to the security realm: In Trump's view, NATO put the US in the position to offer support for other states while receiving little in return. Therefore, the prognosis to remedy that situation entailed higher financial costs for the US allies—that is, fairness in burden-sharing on defence and in trade policy: “the countries we are defending must pay for the cost of this defense, and if not, the US must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves” (Trump, 2016).

Importantly, the populist communication emanating from the White House has challenged the shared understandings at the core of the transatlantic partnership. Trump's disparaging remarks on Europe's future, including cheering on Brexit, stating that NATO was obsolete, and questioning the need for the European bloc (Collinson, 2017), all came as a shock for European officials. This kind of ‘attacks’ formulated against the EU has been *unprecedented*. Never has a US president gone so far in its disparagements, like calling the EU a ‘foe’ on trade (Holland & Mason, 2018). Traditionally, US foreign policymakers have supported the integration project, despite a few periods of ‘adversarial partnership’ (Smith, 2018). But the idea of transatlantic partnership had never been questioned so radically. The lack of respect regarding the essence of the other whereby Trump criticizes the idea of post-sovereignty—a key part of the EU's collective identity (Mitzen, 2006)—or his statements denouncing the fact that Europeans ‘exploit’ Americans in the security and trade realms are all utterances creating a sense of crisis—another key characteristic of populist communication.

*Changes in the Quality of EU-US Dialogues:
From the Advancement of Substantive Cooperation
to Clarification and Reassurance*

These characteristics of populist communication directly affect the practice of diplomatic dialogues—which are increasingly used to clarify and reassure counterparts rather than engage in advanced levels of cooperation—as it was previously the case. The uncertainty sowed by populist communication creates new concerns that take priority, thereby shifting the key function of diplomacy away from the promotion of cooperation towards more basic tasks of clarification and reassurance. As a result, the quality of the dialogue is diminished.

Participants of transatlantic dialogues systematically report that since Trump has taken his functions as ‘chief-diplomat’, more time is dedicated

to clarifying his intentions instead of focusing on substantial cooperation. US diplomats recognize they must adapt to Trump's populist communication and engage in a "damage control" function—aimed at reassuring partners. Throughout Trump's presidential term, US diplomats have constantly explained to their European allies that the implementation of foreign policy decisions will be more reasonable than those announced in the President's tweets (Cooper 2019a, b). Turning to the European perspective, a sense of frustration and disappointment is Tangible in the way through which Europeans talk about their dialogical experience around this time. They complain that the content of the dialogue is geared towards clarifying issues that were once taken for granted, instead of focusing on substantive cooperation.

Following her visit to the US after Trump's election, former EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Mogherini stressed: 'it is the *first* time that my visit to Washington focuses on the bilateral relations rather than crises we have around us—this is telling us the new era we are entering in. This is a moment in history where we are called to avoid taken for granted, that people understand the added value of our friendship' (Mogherini, 2017). Commenting on the first contacts with various US interlocutors, an MEP reported, 'we welcomed these reassurances but also noted that it was *unfortunate* that they were needed at all' (Member of the European Parliament, 22 March 2017). Reinforcing this point, the delegation's chair expressed his incredulity regarding the need to reassure each other: 'it is *amazing* that we are re-assuring each other about the importance of NATO on an occasion like that (TLD)—I would never have thought that! Normally, we try to act together, which is the expected way to proceed but now half of the interaction is used to clarify what has been said the week before. We clearly re-iterated that it is not the way we would *expect* the leader of the Western world to act' (Member of the European Parliament, 22 March 2017). This critique referred to Trump's tweet habit, sowing confusion and undermining the well-established relational norm of consultation in line with the friendship identity that usually characterizes the transatlantic relationship.

In contrast to mid-level dialogues among diplomats and lawmakers, the dynamics at the highest levels of dialogue have been more antagonistic—with "insult politics" on display. According to a European diplomat, recalling the G7 Summit in June 2018: "President Trump was insulting one, insulting the other, lauding his relationship with Kim, with Putin, making the argument that Russia needs to come back to that G7 table, in

such a rude, and mocking and misogynist way — it was just nauseating” (Herszenhorn, 2020). Interestingly, European representatives have tried to distract Trump with ceremony, even altered the formats and discussions of international summits to adjust for his limited patience and short attention span, but to no avail (Herszenhorn, 2018). Trump stepped up his rhetorical attacks on the EU, escalated his belligerent trade policies, and even interceded aggressively in domestic politics—creating even more tensions that other layers of dialogues then sought to alleviate.

Change in the Quantity of Dialogues: ‘Let’s Engage, Engage, Engage!’

In parallel to these qualitative changes in dialogical interactions, there is evidence of the persistence and even strengthening of institutional dialogical ties across the pond. When the confusion regarding the US policy vis-à-vis the EU was at its highest point, institutionalized channels of communication have been actively relied upon. While Europeans admitted they have been struggling to make sense of Trump’s foreign policy, they also highlighted the utility of the channels of communication well-established beforehand that allowed them to directly ask their US counterparts for information (EEAS official, 3 March 2017). In terms of quantity, the intensity of the transatlantic dialogues has not varied over the first months of Trump’s presidency and beyond. At the inter-parliamentary level, dialogues have kept taking place twice a year. For executive dialogues, no substantial change has been reported, if any. Dialogues kept going at technical level, deputy, and even assistant secretary level (US State Department official, 1 August 2019). Both European and American diplomats reported, ‘the channels of communication that have been established over the years are still in place and the next dialogues on the agenda are being prepared as if nothing had changed’ (EEAS official, 3 March 2017). As one US diplomat explained, ‘If we don’t get the explicit instruction to lower or stop a dialogue with the EU, it will just keep going’ (US State Department official, 21 February 2017). This suggests that once in place, the consultative mechanisms continue to work, even if the populist communication on the surface indicates otherwise. Examples of high-level dialogues that took place after the elections include the meetings of the Energy Council, the Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial dialogue in June 2017 and the 15th EU-US Information Society dialogue (Kostaki, 2018). At the civil society level, dialogues between businesses and consumer

groups continued as usual and have been working out propositions to improve transatlantic relations in light of the new situation (Transatlantic Consumers Dialogue (TACD) and Transatlantic Business Council (TABC) members, 30 March 2017).

Furthermore, the sense of urgency—created by the populist presidential communication—has prompted a variety of actors to build new bridges and consolidate ties over the Atlantic. While institutionalized dialogues under the new administration kept going, a myriad of other actors have sought to preserve the strength of the relationship through the practice of diplomatic dialogue. For instance, a new understanding has emerged regarding the enhanced responsibility of the legislative bodies to nurture the transatlantic relationship and reinforce existing channels of communication: ‘In this new context, we—as lawmakers—have to go out and explain the importance of the relationship to our respective administrations *more than ever*’ (Member of the European Parliament, 15 December 2016). This statement expresses a palpable sense of urgency related to extraordinary circumstances and to a degree of uncertainty of a ‘deeper kind’ threatening established shared understandings. Concomitantly, the reinforcement of the channels of communication has been seen as vital: ‘It was useful to diversify further the people we met with, universities and the think tank communities, but we also acknowledge the need to invest more in the new power brokers on the Republican side’ (Member of the European Parliament, 22 March 2017).

Finally, paradiplomacy, that is, the participation of local and regional governments in international relations (Paquin, 2020)—has gained in importance during this period with the reinforcement of direct ties between US cities and states with Europe, bypassing the Trump-era White House altogether. According to California Governor Jerry Brown, who was received at the EP, ‘contacts between US states and other countries can be helpful and important, because you have to keep talking. This business of yelling at each other across the ocean is not good’ (Birnbaum & Jaffe, 2017). This approach has also been favoured by Wolfgang Ischinger, former German diplomat, and chairman of the Munich Security Conference—who called on all relevant stakeholders to work with states, industry, and civil society: “The US is more than just the White House. So let’s engage, engage, engage” (Herszenhorn, 2020). In sum, those are all important manifestations that prove the resilience of diplomacy in the age of rising anti-diplomatic populism.

CONCLUSION

Through the examination of the impact of populist communication on the practice of dialogue in the transatlantic context, I have shown that diplomacy in the age of populism is more resilient than assumed. While the quality of the dialogue may be diminishing as its key function shifts from advancing cooperation towards clarification and reassurance to cope with the disruption caused by populist rhetoric, we simultaneously observe a growth in the quantity of dialogical interactions involving a myriad of old and new diplomatic actors that attempt to counterbalance the negative impact of populist rhetoric on the state of the relationship. This suggests that populist communication through its disruptive frames—contributes to the phenomenon of paradiplomacy—involving the participation of sub-national agents in international relations (Paquin, 2020).

Yet the finding that anti-diplomatic and anti-diplomacy populist communication reinforces diplomatic activity while changing its substance in terms of quality raises important questions for the future of this institution. Populist communication shifts the attention and efforts of diplomatic players to more basic functions of diplomacy (i.e. reassurance and clarification) rather than letting diplomacy continue as usual and constitute the key engine to flourishing international cooperation. For now, this damage-control mode can be considered as proof of the institution's resilience. Yet, over the long run, we cannot exclude the possibility that a tipping point will be reached, whereby the sustained populist onslaught will effectively start damaging the deep core of diplomatic practice. It is only with more hindsight that we will be able to fully gauge the extent to which the performance of populist communication is in fact *order-eroding*.

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Populist Humiliation Narratives and the Mobilization of Resistance

Alexandra Homolar and Georg Löfflmann

INTRODUCTION

Populist political agents from the right of the political spectrum tell visceral stories of insecurity—from countries overrun by criminal migrants to warnings of impending economic collapse and terminal national decline—that frame the fears and grievances of ‘the people’ as being systematically ignored and marginalized by a corrupt ‘establishment’. Much of the appeal of this antagonist logic of populism has been associated with the wedding of ‘antielite and antiestablishment discursive appeals to the political mobilization of the excluded and the alienated’ (Roberts, 2015,

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p. 142). Indeed, as a device of popular mobilization, right-wing populism is seen to feed directly into perceptions of loss of status and relevance (Marchlewska et al., 2017) that are shared between populists and their voters (Jardina, 2019; Löfflmann, 2022; Norris & Inglehart, 2018). Situated broadly within research that treats populism as a ‘rhetorical style’ (Canovan, 1981), a ‘flexible mode of persuasion’ (Kazin, 1995), and a ‘populist discourse’ (Hawkins et al., 2012, 2019), the narrative inquiry in this chapter likewise emphasizes that populist rhetoric structured around a fundamental antagonistic relationship between ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’ nurtures feelings of insecurity to shape political behaviour. Speaking to recent literature on populist memory politics (see e.g. Volk, 2022; Couperus et al., 2022), it demonstrates that creating a sense of humiliation in the present shifts otherwise intangible feelings of loss into concrete perceptions of animosity towards those who are seen to not belong to the ‘true people’.

This chapter provides an inductive analytical narrative to unpack the significance of populist humiliation narratives, and it proceeds as follows. The first section discusses how populist rhetoric centred on humiliation conjures images of a glorious past to demean the present. It shows that fostering a fantasy of national greatness and belonging nurtures feelings of resentment, pride, and nostalgia. The second section focuses on how populist humiliation narratives create a sense of shared victimhood between populist political agents and the ‘true people’ and shift blame outwards onto those who are seen to not belong, both horizontally and vertically. The final section explores in more detail how humiliation acts as an identity driver that fosters the creation of both solidarity towards the in-group and conflictual behaviour towards a broad range of undeserving Others. As we show, negative emotions are not simply ‘phenomena to be managed’ but are, rather, a resource of affective mobilization that political agents actively draw on to shape political behaviour (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2012, p. 156). Indeed, humiliation narratives anchor populist messaging in feelings of pride and hope on the one hand, and anxiety and anger on the other. This underscores our main argument that populist political agents channel a broad range of emotions to mobilize resistance against established democratic norms and practices for political gain.

THE POPULIST IMAGINARY OF GREATNESS AND CARNAGE

Right-wing populist rhetoric creates and reinforces a sense of existential crisis and disempowerment in the everyday (Homolar & Löffmann, 2022; Homolar & Scholz, 2019). To a significant extent, this is rooted in a general perception of loss of cultural identity, economic security, and political relevance (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Steele & Homolar, 2019; Norris & Ingelhart, 2018). A series of public opinion survey studies has attested to the resonance of populist vernacular narratives of degradation in Western societies, in particular among white working-class and non-university educated voters, where they recorded widespread sentiments of anti-elite resentment, cultural anxiety, and concern over the loss of status and privilege (Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012; Jardina, 2019; Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2018). For the United States, Hochschild's (2018) ethnographic study of the American Right identified a set of interlocking 'deep stories' of victimhood, marginalization, and alienation that have left people feeling like 'strangers in their own land'. The French geographer Christophe Guilluy (2019) similarly described a pertinent sense of displacement and disillusionment by a 'peripheral France', whose population of small towns and villages felt both economically threatened and culturally alienated by the forces of globalization and ignored by the French government, business, and media elite. For the United Kingdom, David Goodhart (2017) located a cultural divide between cosmopolitan 'anywheres' and locally oriented 'somewheres', with the latter tending to support Britain's exit from the European Union (Brexit) and feeling disenfranchised by an 'out-of-touch' London establishment. Political agents frequently speak to and reproduce these scholarly observations. Barack Obama, in turn, linked the strong performance of Donald Trump in the 2020 US presidential elections to the Republican Party's focus on identity politics that has persistently reinforced a sense of victimhood among white men for electoral gain (Holpuch, 2020).

Populist political agents, however, do not merely frame the present as being in a state of crisis. In their rhetoric of mobilization against the establishment and the current state of affairs, idealized images of a bygone 'golden age' are placed side by side with exaggerated images of the present in a state of carnage and degradation (Levinger & Lytle, 2001, p. 177). In the here and now, so the story goes, the 'true' people have been cheated out of a past of national greatness, fueling fears over relative deprivation particularly in those who already hold a social dominance orientation and

authoritarian values (Pratto & Shih, 2000; Pettigrew, 2017; Golec de Zavala et al., 2017). In the populist security imaginary, the myths of ‘Past triumphs rise up to humiliate the present self’ (Koestenbaum, 2011, p. 4). Consider, for example, how Marine Le Pen, a top candidate in the 2017 French presidential election and leader of the National Front political party (now renamed as National Rally), described the international standing of the country in the summer of 2016. She characterized France as ‘an old and a great civilization’ in which the world had once seen ‘the symbol of the struggle against tyranny’ (Le Pen, 2016). In the present, Le Pen argued, ‘censors of greatness’, in an act of ‘self-hatred’, had actively stripped the country of this ‘national romance’, as she characterized France instead as a country defeated in war and ‘subjected to powers who defile its name’ (Le Pen, 2016).

The previous year, on the other side of the Atlantic, the TV personality and billionaire Donald Trump had publicly announced his candidacy for US President at Trump Tower in New York City on 22 June 2015, in front of what he falsely described as thousands of people, claiming that ‘There’s been no crowd like this’. He began his announcement speech with the observation that the United States of America was ‘in serious trouble’, and that while ‘we used to have victories’, the America of today no longer had them. Because the American Dream was ‘dead’, Trump argued, a ‘cheerleader’ was needed to root for the country, ‘somebody that literally will take this country and make it great again’. He ended with the promise that if he was elected to serve as the 45th President of the United States, he would bring back the country ‘bigger and better and stronger than ever before’.

Affective appeals related to believing in the greatness of the country and restoring its rightful place and former glory had already featured prominently in the Brexit referendum campaign in the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. Conjuring the ‘vestiges of Empire’ (Dorling & Thomlinson, 2019, p. 3), a past characterized by global reach, power, and influence when Britannia had ‘ruled the waves’, was a major narrative element in the Vote Leave campaign. Nigel Farage, then leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), for example, told his captive audience in Grimsby in May 2015 that his party had faith ‘in a Britain that re-establishes itself across the world’. In bright letters, the stage-background shouted the campaign’s central motto: ‘Believe in Britain’—a slogan resurrected by then UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson (2020) in his attempt to rally support for his government’s widely criticized approach to tackling the

Covid-19 pandemic. In populist humiliation narratives, the country of the present is described as a fundamentally weakened nation, systematically disadvantaged through ‘bad deals’ negotiated by the establishment and exploited by allies and enemies alike. The explicit tension that emerges between past and present, which is integral to populist humiliation narratives, serves as a political tool that ‘weaponizes the emotion of nostalgia’ (Stanley, 2018, pp. 19–20), and aggravates ‘postcolonial melancholia’ through assigning new political meaning to national myths and memories (Kinnvall, 2018, p. 525). Here, emotive discursive anchoring takes place through highly selective representations of the past in the present (Campbell, 2020; Homolar & Rodriguez-Merino, 2019; Solomon, 2017).

Despite their significantly different contexts, Nigel Farage, Marine Le Pen, and Donald Trump’s speeches all revolved around creating an image of their respective country’s past as something that is not only to be celebrated but also to be restored in a present that is characterized by carnage and decay. Although the contours remained remarkably vague and temporarily undescribed, in each case the country’s virtuous essence had been lost, and tragically so. The speeches thus exemplify narratives that stimulate two seemingly incompatible emotive responses—‘a deep sense of grievance and a high sense of superiority’ (O’Toole, 2018, pp. 2–3).

In populist humiliation narratives, the country of the present is described as a fundamentally weakened nation, systematically disadvantaged through ‘bad deals’ negotiated by the establishment and exploited by allies and enemies alike. Treasured pasts of national greatness are represented through romanticized images that reduce the present to a demeaning experience. Members of the target audience are constructed as an idealized community of shared origin and destiny, the ‘pure people’ (Mudde, 2004, p. 543), who have been betrayed and humiliated because what is represented as their way of life and righteous place in the world has been lost. Glorious pasts rise up to serve as a benchmark to judge lived and felt experiences in the here and now and to provoke sentiments of unease over the fundamental state of being and feeling at ‘home’ in one’s country (Kinnvall, 2004).

At the same time, populist humiliation narratives are stories of relative deprivation that exacerbate a sense of collective privilege and victimization. They tend to discursively forge a link between highly stylized recollection of national heritage and what Volkan (1988) has defined as ‘chosen traumas’—the selective remembrance of what is constructed as a persecutory event while ascribing to it an excessive amount of emotional and

historic meaning. The historic references to the Second World War in the United Kingdom that are frequently evoked in debates over the future direction of British foreign and domestic policy serve to exemplify this. Brexit-supporting political agents have used this chosen trauma to frame resistance against the European Union as central to the restoration of British national sovereignty and fulfilment of the ‘will of the people’, and as a proud island nation’s heroic uprising against external tyranny. As Foreign Minister, for example, Boris Johnson constructed an analogy between European integration as institutionalized in the EU with past violent attempts to establish a pan-European hegemony by a single nation: ‘Napoleon, Hitler, various people tried this out, and it ends tragically. The EU is an attempt to do this by different methods’ (Johnson quoted in Walker, 2019).

SHARED HUMILIATION AS AFFECTIVE MOBILIZATION DEVICE

Humiliation narratives encourage a sense of group identity and in-group solidarity. Representations and collective perceptions of being humiliated by elites and undeserving Others provide a powerful psychological mechanism that functions as an affective ‘glue’ that binds together those who feel powerless, anxious, and betrayed (Ahmed, 2004; Berbrrier, 2000). Consider, for example, how Nigel Farage, as UKIP leader, represented his followers as victims of elite contempt and placed himself among those humiliated. In his opening campaign speech for the 2015 UK general election, he explained that the establishment had shamefully treated its subjects as incapable of making mature choices through ‘building big government and nanny-state Britain, as if we’re not big enough’ (Farage, 2015). But Farage claimed: ‘We will turn the other cheek, we will ignore their insults’ (Farage, 2015), signalling that he himself is not only one of the dishonoured but is also on their side and is acting on their behalf (Haslam et al., 2010). During the 2016 US Presidential race, Republican candidate Donald Trump, articulated similar outrage when the campaign of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton characterized the backers of her opponent as racist, xenophobic, and sexist. Trump supporters were subsumed by Clinton under the disgracing label of ‘the basket of deplorables’, thereby rejecting their claims to righteousness and Americanness as well as their ‘very status to have made such a claim at all’ (Torres & Bergner, 2010, p. 199). In response, throughout much of his September campaign events, Trump put the exoneration of his followers centrestage. His speech

on 12 September 2016 in Baltimore is a prime example. Here Trump declared that:

Our support comes from every part of America, and every walk of life... These were the people Hillary Clinton so viciously demonized.... that Hillary Clinton called deplorable, irredeemable and un-American. She called these patriotic men and women every vile name in the book, [dividing them] into baskets as though they were objects, not human beings.

In this humiliation narrative, the Republican presidential candidate created a vivid image of his supporters as part of the common people, the 'true' people, who were unjustifiably and undeservedly demeaned by his opponent's campaign. Uniting behind a label of outcasts has shown remarkable persistence. When President Joe Biden (2022a, b) described supporters of the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement surrounding Donald Trump as 'semi-fascists' endangering American democracy and representing 'an extremism that threatens the very foundations of our Republic', outrage was widespread among Republican politicians and voters. While rejecting labels of extremism and fascism, Biden's remarks were widely described as insults against 'us', to shame and humiliate us, the true people. Consider, for example, how former Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley (2022, emphasis added), reacted to the President's comments by creating a sense of belonging among those humiliated:

It's unthinkable that he [President Biden] would be so condescending and criticize half of America for just wanting our country to go back to where it was when the economy was good, when streets were safe, and when the rule of law mattered. The idea that he condemned us was worse than Hillary calling us deplorable, was worse than Obama calling us extremists. He basically called us bad people. Joe Biden just proved he's the last person that's ever going to help us get things back to normal.

Narrating shared humiliation signals empathy for the conditions of insecurity that 'ordinary' people experience in their everyday lives. Populist political agents echo the humiliating experience of their audiences in their self-styled role as leader of the resistance: they give voice to the 'underdog' by supposedly 'telling it as it is'. The promise of returning those who have been victimized to their righteous status that is intimately tied to a narrative emphasis on humiliation allows populist political agents to form a

positive and affirmative emotive connection with their audiences (Mercer, 2014, p. 517). A sense of shared humiliation forges an affective bond between the ‘forgotten people’, *Les Oubliés*, and the populist who shares in their pain and sense of grievance. Humiliation narratives thus go beyond populist political agents’ attempts to look and sound like the people they claim to represent.

The use of humiliation as an essential marker of belonging is aimed at removing what is seen as a disturbance to the glorious collective self. Take, for instance, the 45th American President’s tendency to amplify ‘true’ Americans’ grievances amid the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests against structural racism, police brutality, and the public presence of Confederate symbols in the United States. Trump’s populist humiliation performance included falsely claiming during a CBS News interview on 17 July 2020 not only that white people were disproportionately likely to die at the hands of law enforcement but also that the protesters engaged in treasonous behaviour. In Autumn 2020, speaking on Constitution Day from the National Archives in Washington DC, he shifted the blame for protests against police violence and racial injustice onto ‘decades of left-wing indoctrination in our schools’. Specifically, Trump derided the New York Times’ Pulitzer Prize-winning 1619 Project, which details US history from the first arrival of enslaved Africans on America’s shores, alongside Critical Race Theory more broadly, as being part of ‘a crusade against American history’. People on ‘the Left’, the President claimed, used the school curriculum to ‘bully Americans into abandoning their values, their heritage and their very way of life’. He made the starkly divisive announcement that he was signing an executive order to establish a ‘1776 Commission’ aimed at removing the ‘ideological poison’, ‘toxic propaganda’, and ‘twisted web of lies’ of ‘radical’ history education on systemic racism in America, which he claimed as this was dissolving ‘the civic bonds that tie us together’. In its place he called for the establishment of a pro-American ‘patriotic education’ that ‘celebrates the truth about our nation’s great history’. In the same speech, in another nod to the myth of the Lost Cause, Trump promised to add a statue of Caesar Rodney, a slave owner who signed the Declaration of Independence, to the National Garden of American Heroes park that he proposed to create during a speech at Mount Rushmore on 4 July 2020. Trump stated:

American parents are not going to accept indoctrination in our schools, cancel culture at work or the repression of traditional faith, culture and

values in the public square... For many years now, the radicals have mistaken Americans' silence for weakness. They're wrong.

The populist humiliation fantasy of suffering and loss of control over life and livelihood here becomes integral to and constitutive of identity for those who belong, acting as an affective device of mobilization. Regardless of what insults are thrown at them, it signals that the true people hold together, loyal to where they come from, sharing experiences of pride in the face of betrayal and adversity. As one rural voter in the United States declared, a sense of shared humiliation and perception of disdain for their way of life from urban liberals, Black Lives Matter activists, and Democrats was a powerful motivator to vote for Trump in 2020 despite misgivings over his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic: 'People felt slighted by them calling us racist hicks and talking about the backwards Midwest out in the sticks' (McGreal, 2020). Through humiliation, collective victimhood becomes agentic (Jacoby, 2015).

Because humiliation takes place within a relationship where one party, who expects a higher status, perceives that they are lowered in status (Saurette, 2005, p. 12), it leads to feelings of mourning over the loss of status as well as rage and envy towards those who have blocked the 'true' people from regaining wholeness. It is important to note that a humiliating experience does not need to be linked to an actual loss of social or economic status to drive vertical blame-attribution towards the nefarious elites and undeserving others who have put the 'true' and 'innocent' people in this position of loss and marginalization. Rather, it can work as a powerful anticipated emotion, where the expectation of a potential future loss is brought forward to shape how people feel and act in the present (Barbalet & Demertzis, 2013; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2015; Neckel, 1991).

NARRATIVE MOBILIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF POPULIST RESISTANCE

In populist humiliation discourse, the exclusive community of the true people who share a common origin and destiny are not only separate from the nefarious elites 'above' but also from those unwanted Others 'below'. Upward blame-attribution is rhetorically focused explicitly on those located outside positions of power, with a particular emphasis on the downward mobilization of anger towards Otherness. A key discursive

focus is on newcomers to the country, whom Trump framed as criminals, rapists, killers, snakes, and terrorists, while Boris Johnson engaged in deriding jibes about people of colour, both of which have been widely reported on in the news. The populist emphasis on dehumanizing immigrants who take our jobs, our housing, and our health care while posing a security risk to our women and children has been widely discussed. That the devaluing framing of migrant Others gains traction may be linked less to prior-held outright xenophobia in target audiences that populist political agents speak to and give voice to. Rather, this should be understood as a reaction to a perception of self-devaluation that is both linked to and stoked by populist humiliation narratives, where undeserving Others are seen to receive preferential treatment to the true people.

Following the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, the life-long Eurosceptic politician Nigel Farage also consistently invoked the rhetoric of establishment betrayal, accusing the mainstream Conservative and Labour parties of attempting to subvert the 'true' will of the people and sabotaging Britain's exit from the tyranny of the European Union. He went as far as conjuring up the image of armed resistance against foreign enemies in war, declaring that if Brexit was not delivered 'then I will be forced to don khaki, pick up a rifle and head for the front lines' (quoted in: Peck, 2017). The statement, extensively criticized for inciting violence, took place in the broader context of widespread attempts to daunt those delaying the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. On 4 November 2016, for example, *The Daily Mail* featured the frontpage headline 'Enemies of the People' underneath the pictures of three high court judges. Widely seen as a deliberate attempt to intimidate those seeking to uphold the rule of law, extremist Brexit supporters used the headline to call, across social media platforms, for beheading what they saw as treasonous judges. The display of outrage over 'out of touch' judges who 'declared war on democracy' followed the murder of the British Labour Party MP Jo Cox five months earlier, with the accused murderer provocatively replying 'death to traitors, Freedom to Britain' when asked to state his name in court.

In the United Kingdom, attacking elites as enemies of the true people, the defenders of their rightful place in society, continued beyond the formal triggering of Article 50 to begin the process of exiting the European Union. For example, on 30 March 2019 two rallies took place a few hundred metres apart in Westminster to protest the United Kingdom's delayed exit from the European Union. The Leave Means Leave rally at Parliament

Square and the far-right Make Brexit Happen event at Whitehall took place amidst chants of ‘out means out’ and shouts of ‘treason’ and ‘traitors’ directed at those seen as disavowing the will of the people. Rally attendees soon turned sentiments of humiliation and betrayal into anger, shifting vocal discontent over the abstract experience of narcissistic injury into a direct physical abreaction that targeted Members of Parliament and journalists in an expression of narcissistic rage.

Within the context of both the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and the Black Lives Matter protests in the United States, a second rift between those who belong and those who do not has been opened widely in recent populist humiliation discourse. Focused on ‘good’ people and ‘bad’ people, this goes beyond the rhetoric that chastises immigrant Others. In the United Kingdom, those who voted to stay within the European Union are ridiculed as ‘Remoaners’, while in the United States those who hold anti-racist positions are derided as criminals. Taking the knee at the singing of the national anthem as many, predominantly African American players in the National Football League had adopted as a sign of silent protest was, for Trump, an insufferable affront against the honour of the nation. Speaking of the Black Lives Matter protestors as ‘Antifa’ at a Press Gaggle on 18 September 2020, Trump asserted that ‘these are thugs. These are bad people. These are people that hurt ... a lot of good people’. His supporters, in turn, patrolled streets in Southern US cities such as Louisville, Kentucky, as self-described ‘patriots’—dressed in combat gear, armed with guns and rifles, and with American flags in hand.

Blame-shifting strategies of hate and racism are certainly not unique to populist rhetoric. Yet the above discussion serves to illustrate that populist humiliation discourse relies upon such messaging, directed in particular at white (male) audiences (Homolar & Löffmann, 2022), to give sense to vague feelings of loss and marginalization and to show a way out, fueling feelings of empowerment that are directly linked to a desire for revenge and to inflict harm rather than a sense of defeatism, inertia, or passivity. Trump’s call, during the presidential debate on 29 September 2020, for the neo-fascist and white supremacist ‘Proud Boys’ to ‘stand back and stand ready’ was widely interpreted as thinly veiled encouragement of violence by those identifying with a narrative of white victimhood. The desperate yearning to reestablish pride and honour through warding off humiliation is accompanied ‘by assaulting and injuring others and thus transferring one’s own shame and dishonor onto them’ (Gilligan, 2017, p. 175). As Harkavy (2000, p. 350) put it:

on the left side of this equation, so to speak, are humiliation, shame, defeat, and loss. On the other side of the equation are revenge and vengeance, plus retaliation, payback, “tit for tat” and, perhaps, revisionism and irredentism. These are no mere quibbles.

The events surrounding the November 2020 US elections, which saw the Democratic Presidential nominee Joe Biden win by a sizeable majority of the popular and Electoral College vote—and Trump unwilling to concede—serve to illustrate how ‘taking back control’ through a humiliation-centric discourse can mobilize violent resistance against established democratic norms and procedures. After weeks of stoking misguided grievances over an election he baselessly claimed had been stolen from the true people, Trump incited a mob of his supporters to express their anger over the allegedly bullying, cheating, and corrupt political elite through rampage. They stormed the Capitol on 6 January 2021, moments after the defeated one-term President had reassured them that:

You’re stronger, you’re smarter, you’ve got more going than anybody. And they try and demean everybody having to do with us. And you’re the real people, you’re the people that built this nation.

During the violent riots Trump emphasized with the perpetrators in a videotaped message: ‘I know your pain. I know you’re hurt.... You see the way others are treated that are so bad and so evil. I know how you feel’. Audio-visual evidence submitted to the subsequent Impeachment trial in the US Senate documented how chants of ‘traitors’, ‘fight for Trump’, and ‘stop the steal’ emerging from the mob of overwhelmingly white, male insurrectionists echoed Trump’s rhetoric of popular resistance against humiliation of the ‘real people’. The political significance of shared humiliation as a narrative device, then, is that inward feelings of shame, provoked through the demeaning experience, are directed outward, away from the individual and collective weakened self via blame-attribution (Hejdenberg & Andrews, 2011, p. 1278). Indeed, when vulnerable, weak, despised, and helpless parts of the Self are projected upon the external, ideologically distorted member of the outgroup, this fosters both aggression and violence (Bohleber, 2003). From a psychological perspective, such cruelty directed at members of the outgroup will not come as a surprise. Individuals who experience anger in the form of narcissistic rage after encountering humiliation tend to ‘show total lack of empathy towards

the defender' (Kohut, 1972, p. 386). Not only does humiliation have a strong emotive pull, but collaboration, dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution are difficult, if not impossible, courses of action for those experiencing a strong sense of humiliation combined with narcissistic injury.

CONCLUSION

While the language of populism is increasingly used as a weapon to discredit political opponents, populist communication practices and performances shape politics, policies, and political behaviour, as the contributions by Aiolfi; Meibauer; Skonieczny and Boggio; Rana and Destradi et al. (all in this volume) have also emphasized. In this chapter we explored how populist political agents rely upon humiliation-centric discursive frames to transpose abstract concerns about enmity and threat into everyday perceptions of insecurity. They do so by appealing to complex and ambiguous emotions, both positive and negative, to create and channel individual and collective energies around social divisions. Populist humiliation narratives are a mobilization device that stokes conflictual behaviour, with the animus directed against a broad range of undeserving Others, while creating an emotional bond between those who perceive themselves as part of the community of 'deplorables'.

Our narrative inquiry underscores that populist political agents from the right of the political spectrum are complicit in creating the very sense of humiliation that they promise to tackle. Populist political agents may act as challengers to 'business as usual' (Laclau, 2005, p. 123). Yet it is their use of humiliation narratives that helps to widen the limits of possibility through an emotive shift away from 'rational' political action towards an emotive politics of outrage, which underwrites a radical departure from—and resistance against—established policy norms and electoral preferences. As this chapter suggests, rather than identifying humiliation with a sense of weakness and passivity, fantasies of shared humiliation are a powerful narrative tool in the hands of populist identity entrepreneurs to manipulate public sentiments for political gain. Reversing the roles of humiliator and victim, they enable the forging of an affective bond of positive affirmation with their audiences through invoking a shared reality of pain and suffering. Responsibility for the decay and loss in the present is assigned to domestic and foreign 'enemies of the people', transposing the emotive repertoire of humiliation into calls for both a radical exclusion of unwanted Others and overhauling the status quo in domestic and international politics.

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